

THE  
CHRISTIAN'S LOOKING-GLASS,  
OR THE  
TIMOROUS SOUL'S GUIDE,  
BEING  
A DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK  
OF THE  
HOLY SPIRIT UPON THE HEART;  
INTENDED FOR  
THE RELIEF OF THE DISCONSOLATE.

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*By the Rev. T. PRIESTLEY.*

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PART THE SECOND.

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TO THE

READER.

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MANY who are thoroughly satisfied that they see distinctly the folly of such persons as imagine they can obtain salvation by the deeds of the law, yet fear making a mistake as dreadful ; for they are dark indeed, who are not fully convinced that an unapplied Christ, will prove at the last, to all deceived professors, a damning one. It is therefore impossible, that a general faith of Christ's being the true Messiah, should ever satisfy a sincere christian who has had a sense of his lost condition, without the Spirit of God give him an earnest of his interest in him.

Though the salvation of a soul does not depend on a persuasion of being interested in Christ, yet the importance of assurance is such, that it is impossible to enjoy much comfort without being possessed of it in some degree ; therefore, to neglect any means which God has appointed for the obtaining of it, is the greatest folly imaginable. When men are suspicious about their titles to a worldly inheritance, they will neither

spare cost nor labour to have the pleasure of certainty.

As a distinct understanding of effectual calling naturally leads the christian to a consideration of God's everlasting love, so a clear knowledge of our state, will have no tendency to lead the mind from Christ, his person, blood, or righteousness, but the reverse. It is a wrong view persons take of themselves, if it incline them to rely on any thing wrought in themselves, as the matter of their justification. An experimental christian can no more depend on grace received, than he can expect his body to be nourished this year by that which supported him the last.

To have an interest in something valuable, has in it a peculiar tendency to engage a man in the study of the advantages of such an acquisition ; and the more a christian perceives of the infinite worth of the blood and righteousness of Christ, the more distinctly he will go out of himself, and depend wholly on him, as the only foundation which God has laid in Zion. Put into a man's possession a purse of gold to keep for some indifferent person, he feels little propensity to enquire what the sum is ; but inform him that it is a present made to himself by some particular friend, he will not rest till he knows the value of the whole. So, a full assurance of an interest in Christ, will have a peculiar tendency to engage  
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the christian in prying into the wonders of that salvation in which now he perceives himself to be interested. The christian wants a happiness not only to enjoy at his death, but to make him comfortable in the whole of his journey to the heavenly world.

The abuse many have made of the evidences of christianity, is no more an argument against writing or preaching on such subjects, than the abusing of the doctrine of grace, by licentious persons, is an argument against the pure gospel being preached : for what doctrine has not been at one time or other abused ! And in this present day, where one is injured by looking too much at something wrought in himself, a great number deceive themselves fatally, by depending on a general faith without any witness of the Holy Spirit !

Though many have fallen into an error, by looking wholly into themselves, and neglecting the proper object of faith, yet this error has been in a great measure owing to setting this subject in a wrong point of view. Experience stated in a scriptural manner, will as effectually lead the mind to the fountain, as the cure the woman received by touching the hem of Christ's garment, led her to a high opinion of her Saviour.

It is my particular design, in this publication, to prevent the christian from building his comfort on uncertain frames and feelings ; and to prove, to a demonstration, that the true believer has as clear an evidence in himself, of his nature being changed, when he is full of complaints, as in those seasons when his joys abound. If this can be demonstrated by Scripture, it may, by the peculiar blessing of God, prevent thousands from spending so much of their time in desponding fears, and gloomy suspicions. Therefore, it is on those scriptures I have particularly enlarged, where the very complaints of a child of God evidently distinguish him from all the men of this world, and prove to himself the truth of his spiritual life as fully, and that in a manner as self-evident, as natural life is evidenced by those actions which are common to the living body ; and of which bodies dead are totally incapable.

Perhaps there never was a period, in the which either the number of presumers, or timorous christians, was greater; and if sermons or publications tend not to detect the one, and encourage the other, they are not calculated for doing much good.

Those who presume on a general faith, which they never examine, are far more secure in the hands of the grand adversary, than the profligate. When the consciences of such, are disturbed by  
sin,



sin, they have a refuge, "*they believe;*" but if this believing is only a general notion, without the witnessing of the Holy Spirit, it only confirms the soul in its awful delusion. Who could discover more confidence than that described by Christ in the foolish virgins—They were bold even at the very gates of heaven.

It has been a remark made long ago, that it is scarce possible to attempt to comfort the feeble minded, without making the hypocrite more secure; supposing this may be the case, it is the incumbent duty of ministers, to say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong; and to attempt to lift up the hands which hang down. I remember it to have been a saying of an eminent minister, "He would not be deterred from comforting the dear people of God, though many hypocrites caught at the childrens bread."—I hope, in the fear of God, and depending on the teaching of the Holy Ghost, I have attempted to enlarge on such scriptures, which cannot be fully understood; but by those who have real experience; and carnal persons being strangers both to the joys, and more especially to the complaints of the people of God, by this method I hope that I have in some measure avoided that rock; so that while I write for the comfort and advantage of the experimental christian, it may also be a means



means of alarming such as are strangers to the experience of true believers.

Nothing is more common to timorous christians, than to form such ideas of being loved of God, as are quite opposite to what is left on record in Scripture; therefore to prove to those their error and mistake, by the most striking scripture testimonies, may be a means of setting some right, who are so much nonplussed with themselves, that they know not which way to take.

According to the notions many form to themselves, christians should be more like those who are got above the reach of sorrow and difficulty, than soldiers who are in the field of battle, hard struggling with an unbelieving heart, and all the difficulties they meet with in an evil world: whereas, it is the design of God, by those very trials he wisely permits, to show to the believer his weakness and sin; many who discern not this, are at a loss how to reconcile such distressing trials, and cannot see them to be consistent with that infinite love, with which God loveth his chosen; but we are not at a loss how to find in scripture, this proved to a demonstration, *i. e.* that the most eminent in the cause of Christ, have been exercised with the most afflictive dispensations outwardly, and at the same time inwardly also.

I have attempted to set this in a right point of view, and to prove from the expressions of the  
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most eminent, that the fears and cares, so much complained of by many, are the very same which millions have had, who are now without doubt in a world of glory.

I apprehend that most thinking people will agree in this, that persons addicted to a timorous frame of spirit, frequently prove to be the most sincere, and a greater ornament to their profession, than those of a more bold and intrepid disposition ; this makes it evident, it is not because they have less religion, that they are thus perplexed.

That which has rendered the greatest part of what has been said and written on this subject almost useless, has been the supposition that false professors may attain such criterions and evidences of grace, and by the help of Satan, arrive at a higher pitch of comfort, than themselves have experienced ; this strikes some with such force, that they have been afraid of concluding any thing, from the greatest comforts they have ever enjoyed.

All who have true experience, find their complaints more habitual than their joys ; they have them more frequently, and they flee not away so soon as comforts. Many more are saying, *O, that I had wings as a dove ; or, O, wretched man that I am ! then, O ! God, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise.* In the Psalms, we more frequently

quently meet with expressions of complaint than those which appear to be the effect of joy ; consequently those evidences, which are peculiarly manifested in complaints, will be found more calculated to relieve the distressed, than those which are not easily seen in such dark seasons. As natural life is as much evidenced in pain as in health, so spiritual life is as clearly to be discerned in the deepest complaints as in the highest joys.

The most eminent christians who have been indulged with the greatest manifestations of divine love cannot be satisfied with these; nor will they rest their assurance wholly on such seasons ; but will repeatedly try themselves by the true touch-stone, the word of God ; and without they discover an agreement with that unerring rule, they obtain no satisfaction.

That assurance is the most agreeable to scripture, which is not built on a few single circumstances, but has the whole word of God for its basis. An assurance thus founded, will not so easily be shaken, as that which has for its chief support, some comfortable seasons.

There are many persons, though they feel not much perplexity about their state, yet find great benefit by reading and hearing what may be said on this subject.

I have been induced to write on this subject  
from

from a variety of motives : There is a peculiar satisfaction in having any opportunity of being the means of comforting any of Christ's lambs. Christ himself paid particular attention to such in his sermon on the mount ; Mat. v. 3—6.

I know that many serious persons, when it has pleased God to exercise their faith and patience with heavy affliction, have been chiefly distressed for want of assurance ; had this point been satisfactorily obtained, they would have been enabled to bear either confinement or pain with composure ; but their fears turn their very physic almost into poison ; and while they are harrassed with the awful apprehensions of their afflictions being in wrath, they have not pleaded for that support, which otherwise they would have done.

Others I have observed in a case peculiarly affecting. This has been when some disorder has made their recovery improbable, nay in a measure impossible ; they in this affecting season, when they would have given the whole world, if they had it in their possession, to speak a word to relieve a distressed family, yet on account of their inability to discern their state, they have been the greatest part of their illness in a dark and distressing situation, and far from having that assurance they could wish. This is peculiarly afflicting to a family, and most of all to the afflicted person himself, yet I have known such, before they  
have



have been called to cross Jordan, filled with joy, and die triumphing.

Indeed christians who follow not the advice of the Holy Ghost, in making their calling and election sure, are frequently found like ships at sea without an anchor. Every wave of trouble seems to threaten their destruction, and they are in storms at their wits end.

Besides all this, it is an advantage of which few are aware, *i. e.* for a man when he is approaching a throne of grace, to be fully persuaded he is one for whom Christ is now interceding, and has more than a welcome to speak his complaint into the ear of an heavenly father, who has loved him with an everlasting love. This gives a boldness which those who are weak in faith, seldom experience.

In my former part, I attempted to show,

First, When it appears that the understanding is truly enlightened.

Secondly, Why christians are said to be partakers of a divine nature.

Thirdly, Why regeneration is compared to a resurrection; and 6 NO 61

Fourthly, In what sense the children of God are said to have new hearts.

In this second part, I have enlarged on those scriptures, in which it appears that the true christian has as evident a proof of grace in his complaining and distressing seasons, as when his consolations abound.

T. P.



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T H E

*Christian's Looking Glass.*

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ROMANS vii. 18.

FOR I KNOW THAT IN ME, THAT IS IN MY  
FLESH, DWELLETH NO GOOD THING : FOR  
TO WILL IS PRESENT WITH ME, BUT HOW  
TO PERFORM THAT WHICH IS GOOD I FIND  
NOT.

**I**T is evident from the contents of this chapter, that notwithstanding we have reason to conclude that the apostle had as deep experience of the depravity of human nature as any man ever had, yet he had not the least suspicion about his state; it rather appears that the more distinct his ideas of his depraved nature were, the more fully he was persuaded of the truth of that grace which was wrought in his own heart. This proves how much the knowledge of both nature

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and grace tends to establish the christian—Most have had experience how disadvantageous it is to be doubting their state upon every appearance of sin.

As the temptations of Christ were evidently for the advantage of the Church, so that experience Paul had of the depths of sin was to make him an eminent instrument in the hand of God for the comfort of others.

Therefore this chapter in particular, in which Paul so fully describes the experience he had of the power of indwelling sin, has been particularly encouraging to christians.

This being the end which God had in permitting the apostle to be so severely tried, we have reason to suppose, few men ever had such a comprehensive view of the depravity of human nature, or more distinct ideas of the nature of true grace than he had. Therefore having such clear conceptions both of nature and grace, was the reason why he speaks with such confidence of all true christians being more than conquerors through him that loved them. When we are assured of our safety, we can minutely reconnoitre the strength and motion of an enemy, which timorous persons are incapacitated for.

Our war with sin would not so much discourage us, if we understood the nature of grace. It would argue the highest folly for a man to  
suspect

suspect whether or no he has got natural life in his body, because he understands so well what life is.

The undoubted evidence Paul had, what the will of the flesh was in all men, confirmed him in this sentiment, that nothing short of a divine power could have made such a change in his own will, or in any of those whom he saw to be made partakers of the same Spirit with himself. A thorough satisfaction in this one point is of great importance to the christian.

Paul's idea of the glorious cause of such a change in his will, made the effect more pleasing. In himself and others he saw the virtue of that covenant made with Christ, in which the promise was given to him, *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.* Ps. cx.

As a believing Israelite, when he set his foot on the land of Canaan, would not only enjoy the land in common with his fellow travellers, but feel a particular pleasure in reflecting on that covenant which God made with Abraham; and being convinced his being brought there was by virtue of that covenant, he would be led to expect all the other mercies mentioned in that covenant; so the christian who has an understanding given him, to see the grand cause why any of the fallen sons of Adam should be brought to the enjoyment of spiritual blessings. Such a believer will not only taste of those present plea-

fures which are to be enjoyed in religion, but by an enlarged view of all the blessings granted in the covenant of grace, he will be capacitated to believe for them all; and having got the earnest, will fully expect the rest—the expectation of which will as really animate his spirits and help him in his spiritual war, as those things he at present possesses.

The hand of God was not more evident in bringing Israel out of Egypt, than in that period when a soul is made willing in a day of divine power; and the more knowledge we have of human nature in its depraved state, the more clearly shall we perceive this.

To see a person willing and desiring the very things to which when in his unregenerate state he had the utmost aversion, proves the cause to be divine, and that it could only originate in the will of God; which must of consequence prove such a person to be loved with an everlasting love; and that this change came not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of men, but by the will of God.

It is evident that the apostle's understanding was remarkably enlarged by that war with sin which he experienced. As he acquired such a knowledge of the law which he had not before his conversion, so he was possessed of new ideas of grace, and the cause of grace in the human heart.



heart. As he was an intire stranger before conversion to the complaints mentioned in this chapter, so he was wholly ignorant of their causes; and it appears by the contents of the chapter, that it was by experience he learnt how to combat his spiritual enemies. Suppose a soldier on the field of battle should be hesitating whether or no he is in the right cause, he would be incapacitated for his duty in the field: So a christian when he is called to war with sin; his suspicions about his state will prevent him warring with that courage which he has who is assured of his salvation.

Though an experimental knowledge of the complaints of christians may be an evidence of a persons being taught of God; yet, when the Holy Spirit is bringing the believer to be acquainted with this mysterious path, it being a way wholly new, and unknown to the christian, till he has been taught it by experience, it is no wonder that the christian is frequently exercised with painful suspicions of his being in a deception: nevertheless when he arrives at a greater degree of knowledge, these gloomy doubts tend greatly to enrich his experience, and to make him the more highly to prize the light of God's countenance. Thus, as strong winds make the tree take root the more deeply and grow more

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firm,



firm, so these doubts and fears tend to strengthen and establish in the end.

The violent struggle Paul had with sin, did not occasion the least variation in his renewed will. He was enabled to distinguish between the *inclination* and *propensity* of his unrenewed part to sin, and at the same time to perceive he had a will and a principle to oppose it, and that in such a manner as he had no knowledge of when he was in his unregenerate state. His renewed part was made the more discernable by the opposition he met with from the old man of sin; and also by this the apostle was fully convinced that man in his depraved state was possessed of an habitual propensity to sin, and that this habit, or quality, was natural to the unrenewed man.

He also found by experience, that in a soul renewed by grace, there was a habit or principle, which not only prevented the christian taking pleasure in sin, but influenced him to desire compleat deliverance from it; nay even renders it impossible that he should ever take that pleasure in it he once did.

Grace is a real habit; not an accidental frame of mind, such as distress or pain occasions in an unregenerate man, which is as the morning cloud and early dew that passeth away: when some disorder which threatens death in a sudden and unexpected manner seems to overtake the sinner, he

he then appears willing to embrace the very things to which in health he has the utmost aversion: but this is no proof of any change in the habit of his soul, but is only an accidental change occasioned by fear and dread; take but away the cause, and the effect ceases immediately: —the man can after this, will, as much as ever to live in sin, and risk all the infinite consequences of eternal things to indulge himself in his folly. The true christian may read in such the truth of the scriptures, that it has happened to them according to the proverb, *The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.* As there is evidently in these no gracious habit, so there is a real renewed principle in real christians, on which account they will never fall away finally.

The apostle compares grace as much to a law of the mind as he considers sin to be a law in his members. The believer in regeneration is made a partaker of a principle of spiritual life, he is renewed in the spirit of his mind, which manifests itself as evidently as the living body proves itself to be alive by natural actions and affections; therefore, however violently the unrenewed part oppose, with his mind he serves the law of God.

Paul was therefore as confident that with his mind he served the law of God, as with his flesh  
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the law of sin; and, notwithstanding the great opposition he met with from his corrupt nature, he found by experience the law of his mind to be an immutable principle: not a mere accidental frame, occasioned by some momentary cause, but a real renovation which originated in God's everlasting love to his person.

This was the reason why the apostle had no doubt of his state, notwithstanding the dreadful conflicts he had with sin: his warfare did not only excite him to pray, but proved to himself that those very sins which once had the dominion over him were now hateful to him. This proves how advantageous it is to be possessed of spiritual knowledge. Such may, with Paul, say, through hard struggling with sin, they are more than conquerors; especially when they perceive the true cause of their being renewed, as they are convinced that infinite love was that which made them spiritually alive. The remains of sin shall never be permitted to make a conquest of them.

As the will is a leading faculty in the soul, so a man may be as sensible what it is that he wills, as what the thing is he hears or sees; and being sensible that no exhortations or convictions can possibly make any real change in the will, he has undoubted evidence that nothing short of an almighty power could have effected that change which he experiences. Therefore those very  
difficulties

difficulties which distress and discourage others, will tend to confirm and establish a christian, who has a distinct idea both of nature and grace; and by being exercised with these, he will find that nothing can possibly reduce him to the frame he was in before regeneration, *i. e.* to be willing to live under the dominion of sin. He is now not only possessed of an understanding of the evil of sin, but of a new principle which effectually enables him to delight in the law of God.

By the contents of this chapter we are taught to have a particular eye to our wills; there is a necessity for this in order to have a clear knowledge of our state; therefore it is of great importance to the christian to understand what the will is before regeneration, and the change that then takes place. By this means he will discern as evident a hand of God, in his being made willing, as in the change which we see was made in Paul.

As will and power are distinct qualities, so they may be discerned apart; and in such a manner, that, when corruption, like a storm, threatens nothing but ruin and destruction to the believer, there is no reason for him to have the least apprehension or suspicion of any change in his will. The renewed will is no more changed by such grievous temptations to sin, than the storm and violence of the waves make  
the



the shipwrecked man willing to be drowned: for nothing appears more dreadful to the christian, than to be taken down the stream of corruption into the whirlpool of destruction; was not hell to be taken into his consideration, for him to turn again as the dog to his vomit appears intolerable.

When Paul compares himself to a man condemned, to drag a dead body, though he was sensible of his inability to rid himself of so grievous a burden, yet this inability would not cause him to suspect his being unwilling to obtain deliverance; it made the burden the more intolerable; for a difficulty that we can obtain deliverance from when we please, is to us of no great concern.

Though the Christian may be sensible of his inability to overcome sin in the manner he could wish, yet if he is well assured of his being a renewed man, and that his state is safe, it will greatly encourage him in his warfare. Fright and terror disqualifies a man for doing that which is in the compass of his power; when on the contrary, fill a man with courage and intrepidity and then he will do all that can be done.

The Christian's will, is to be heavenly and holy; to serve God on earth as those in heaven; and whatever opposition he meets with from his corrupt nature, it is impossible that it should make  
any



any alteration in his will, to make him chuse to live in sin; but it will have the contrary effect, he will hate sin the more: the christian can never say more sincerely from the feeling of his heart, *to will is present with me*, than when he finds the law in his members warring against the law of his mind.

A man may be incapacitated from performing some piece of work on which his heart is set; in this case his infirmity will excite his desires, and make him the more sensible how much he willed the accomplishment of such a thing. If the distressed believer could be as sensible that his temptations cannot alter his state, or make the least change in his will, how much would it encourage him in his Christian warfare? When victory is certain, and the enemy cannot injure us, we march on with life and vigour.

The experimental Christian may be compared to an honest man, who is particularly anxious to conduct himself in all respects as such; but on account of losses in trade, and disappointments, he is utterly incapable of paying every man his own; yet his principle is not in the least degree diminished by his difficulty; so the heaven-born soul has a principle, that all the powers of hell cannot annihilate; and yet from universal experience, no language is more common to christians  
(when

(when they are particularly exercised) than this,  
*I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.*

Some tried souls will bring in this objection, I fear all my struggles with sin are only occasioned by an enlightened conscience, and that I am not made a partaker of a new nature.

I would answer, If this be really the case, you never had any real love to spiritual things, and all your attention to any thing of a religious nature, has merely arisen from fear of hell.

Though a carnal man may dread the consequence of sin, yet this will only draw out his desires the more after it. A christian, with a little attention, will be able to discern, whether his religion, be the effects of natural conscience, or occasioned by a new principle implanted in him by the Holy Ghost.

If every professor was as expert in the use of the Christian armour, as some soldiers are in the use of the sword, it would tend much to their comfort. A little attention to this subject, would enable a christian to see that conscience is not the principal cause of his war with sin. A man may be as fully persuaded what is the desire of his soul, as he is certain, without the possibility of a suspicion, what kind of food is agreeable to his appetite. If we were as much at an uncertainty about natural things as we are about spiritual, a man might be hesitating, whether or no he is possessed

fessed of natural life? I would enquire of such, had you never any solid pleasure in the ways of God? have you no apprehension what it is to desire the light of his countenance? have you never experienced any thing of his love shed abroad in your hearts? are not these desires as really understood by you, as the working of corruption, or any other thing in the natural world? Have not some of your happiest moments been, when hell and damnation were far out of sight? And was not that which caused your pleasure, the sensible enjoyment of spiritual light and comfort? are not such to you far more preferable than wordly pleasures, and can you find any carnal worldly men who can speak in this strain?

Persons disordered in soul, are too much like those who are low spirited in bodily complaints: persons of this cast increase their complaint by suspicions. Whereas many of these would be as much encouraged, could they but perceive their own case clearly; but while they are ignorant of their situation, every symptom of their complaint they imagine to be the harbinger of death. These fears, however, are not fatal, they disturb the peace and comfort of the Christian, but can make no change in his state. Sometimes bodily complaints are a great cause of perplexity, or at least, make soul troubles far more grievous. Persons who are of a consump-

tive habit of body, though real christians, are much addicted to be low spirited.—Many who are troubled with nervous disorders are disconsolate, and ascribe that horror and dread which they feel, to the want of faith, which is really brought on by the want of health;—and their being ignorant of this, is a detriment to the health of their bodies. It is scarcely credible how much a disorder is brought on or increased by fear and suspicion.

Nothing is more common with some, when they experience a hard and unrelenting frame of heart, than to begin immediately to draw the most gloomy conclusion, as if this difficulty was never to be removed, and that they should never experience a happier frame to their dying moments; whereas the very frame itself, if understood, would make a man expect a more agreeable season. Why complain of such a frame? carnal persons are ignorant of such distress, and are satisfied, if conscience accuse them not for some sin committed; all this does but prove, how much the christian differs from the unregenerate; nay, even the most refined moralist is a total stranger to such complaints.

How inconsistent would it be for a man in a hard frost in January, to imagine it will be frost and snow in June, and all the year round! the very winter itself reminds him of a succeeding summer.

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The reason why we do not make such foolish conclusions about natural things, as about spiritual, is, because we soon gain a knowledge of the one, but are very slow in acquiring a knowledge of the other. The Psalmist when low, and under the hidings of God's face, comforts himself with, *I shall yet praise him for the light of his countenance.* It would be impossible to persuade a man in December, that he had never felt the heat of the sun in June, and that he never should again experience the sun very hot, or that he had no love to, or delight in the pleasant season of the year, more than in stormy and tempestuous weather.—How impossible would it be to make impressions on men, who understand natural things, by such arguments; and shall the christian not discern that the sun of righteousness will by and by dispell the darkest gloom and turn all his sorrow into joy?

The reason why persons give way to such suspicions, is not on account of their want of love to religion, but ignorance of the nature of it.—Do we find any who enjoy a perpetual sun-shine, and shall we be surprized if our day is now and then clouded?

We never desire to live under the influences of the Holy Spirit, till our natures are renewed; and the reason why christians have such despondencies afterwards, is to try their faith and increase

the esteem they have for the things of God ; life itself would appear to them intolerable, if they should be deprived of all comforts in religion. They want now something superior to any thing that grows upon the surface of this earth.

Attempt to comfort such complaining persons, with those pleasures which delight the unregenerate part of the world, the more carnal such entertainments are, the more disagreeable will they be to these distressed persons. Therefore it is evident, when no kind of natural amusements will yield content, and nothing but spiritual pleasures are sought after, such persons must have tasted, that the Lord is gracious.—Having tasted of the real pleasures of religion, nothing short of those enjoyments can possibly give content. Those who have tasted of the old wine of the kingdom, have lost their relish for the new.

As men are known by the company they keep, so we may perceive who are real christians by the pleasures they are pursuing. Can a man who is fond of angling to excess, be persuaded that such a recreation is not the very diversion which he delights in ; his preferring this diversion to any other, he is as sensible of, as that he chuses life before death. The christian may conclude as positively, that he prefers the pleasures of religion to all the things of this momentary world.

- Satan

Satan understands better how to perplex and distress the christian, than the believer knows how to defend himself. The old proverb is repeatedly verified, "He will distress where he cannot destroy;" and being a cunning adversary he understands where and in what part to attack the unwary soul. Those in whom he reigns he keeps in peace, these, though they have not any reason to conclude from scripture that their state is safe, yet are wholly unacquainted with this perplexity. They can be content with a very distant hope, that they shall not go to hell; all they wish for in religion is to escape misery; and having no delight in spiritual things, it is impossible they should complain of being disappointed in their enjoyment of them, or at all cast down on that account.

But how much does the true christian differ from these? because he enjoys not that comfort his soul desires, he suspects his state; but could he be indulged with the light of God's countenance, this would be more to him than all the world. Shall those, then, suspect themselves who are overwhelmed with the fear of not having true grace, when nothing under heaven could afford them any pleasure, in comparison to that of being assured of their interest in Christ? this frame is a positive proof that Christ is precious to them: merely to escape hell would not satisfy

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these;

these; they are never so much in their element, as when they are running in the way of God's commands with an enlarged heart; it is the desire of their heart to live near to God, and when under the word, to feel it come with power. And is it possible for any unregenerate men in the world to have such a value for, and delight in spiritual things?

And shall we suppose that unregenerate persons, were ever in this frame? A thorough persuasion that we are in a frame of mind that no unregenerate man in the world ever was in, is a proof of our being born of God.

Tell those of the carnal pleasures which once carried away their hearts, and they can part with all these, for the superior pleasures they find in religion; to these they can now say, as Ephraim to idols, *What have I any more to do with you?*

These do not only differ from others, but far more than they are aware, from what themselves once were. But though the change is thus evident, how often does that suspicion creep in, and spoil all, Is the change a saving one? It must be a saving one, when it is attended with such concomitants as are not possible to be found among any of the unregenerate.

It is easy to discern, that those who have no religion, have little fear but that they can enjoy the benefits of it whenever they please. But  
those



those who are savingly taught, see an interest in Christ to be of such infinite importance, that the very suspicion of a mistake, is intolerable. They also fear if they should be mistaken, that it is an indication that they left off God, to be deceived fatally.

What happiness would many experience, if their ideas of nature and grace, were as distant as those of Paul; they would frequently be saying with him, *Who shall separate us from the love of God.*

Paul in the seventh of Romans, may be compared to a man, travelling to some remote part of the land, who finds that a part of his way lies through a low valley. But when he is in the bottom, he never imagines all the ground he has to travel over, will be thus low. Experience teaches the traveller, that though he be now thus low in the valley, he yet shall soon be on the rising ground again.

Some mention this as an objection; If I were made truly willing, is it possible I should experience so much unwillingness to draw nigh unto God? I feel as if I had no will at all.

This frame must be very perplexing to a christian, who has found his happiest seasons in his closet.

But this very objection originates in ignorance of the will itself. I would ask those who make this objection, Is this unwillingness, the very same

same which you experienced in your carnal state ? Could you not then go about prayer with ease and content ? Did you then complain, though you were at that time, wholly unacquainted with any assistance of the Holy Spirit ? If this objection were thoroughly investigated it would be evident the objector might say in this very frame, *To will is present with me.* This complaint demonstrates itself to be something, which is not to be found among the unregenerate ; the carnal professor seems to enjoy a peace, which nothing disturbs, but such sinful actions, which awakens natural conscience.

If this backwardness to draw nigh unto God be the real cause of this complaint, what is the frame you wish for ? It must of consequence be the very reverse of this, which is a heart drawn by divine love, and a spirit of prayer and supplication ; the defect then is not in the will, but is accidental, not the habitual and constant frame of the heart.

It is evident a person in this frame has more reason to complain for want of power than will. *To will*, says Paul, *is present with me.* But he wanted those drawings of the Holy Spirit, without which the soul, though renewed, cannot draw near to God. Shall a man who feels himself weak and unable to accomplish a thing, begin to suspect his willingness to do it, when nothing

thing

thing would give him greater pleasure, than to be able to do it.

Will a man, whose appetite is out of order by some indisposition, be persuaded that the food he has been partial to, is unpleasant, and that he never set down to partake of it with satisfaction? Such are sensible, that their being incapable of having any pleasure in it, is occasioned by the disorder, their habitual gust for that particular kind of food may be the very same, when recovered from this indisposition.

Though the christian's frame may be out of order for a season, by the working of corruption, this is no argument it will always be the case. A loyal and faithful soldier may be overpowered by numbers, and taken captive, but this is no proof of his willingness to join the enemies troops. Peter though overcome by the temptation, yet had a will to cleave to his master : his will was not changed by his weakness.

Some have this suspicion, That they shall be found to have no more of a renewed will, than the foolish virgins had.—If this be the case, you can carry the empty lamp of a profession, without concern about having the oil in it. Foolish virgins, generally have a stronger antipathy to the power of religion than the world at large. This has been the case in all ages. If a man through fear of presuming, dare not say he has  
real

real love to spiritual things, he may know positively, whether or no, he has an antipathy to those who are eminent for it.

There is no such thing as perfect neutrality in religion, there will be either a love to, and delight in it, or an aversion and hatred, to the real power of it; and to those who live under the influence of it. The unrenewed man is possessed of such an enmity, as renders him incapable of being willing or desirous of enjoying such benefits of salvation by Christ, as are to be possessed in this world: he may have a desire to escape hell; for it cannot be a thing, indifferent to any man, whether he shall go to heaven or hell. A carnal man apprehends something tremendous in being damned; but he will be something more than indifferent, about the enjoyments of religion, for his heart is at enmity with God; therefore he can no more desire communion with God, and live under the influence of religion, than the most wicked profligate can be delighted with the solemn ordinances of God's house.

A christian, when things are at the lowest ebb with him, has something in him, which is not to be found in any unregenerate man, and to which he is a stranger. Augustine, before his conversion, was accustomed to pray. "Lord make me a good man, but not yet." No higher than this, can the unregenerate arrive: but when  
divine



divine grace has made a man willing to be saved, the language of that man, is no longer to-morrow, he is now impatient to see himself interested in Christ, he desires at present to sit under Christ's shadow, and partake of the fruit of the apple tree.

Sin indulged may bring the most lively christian into such a frame, that neither himself, nor perhaps any of his acquaintance, can tell for a season, what to think: had any of the disciples been witnesses to Peter's denying his master, what could they have thought? The Sin of David did not only encourage the wicked, but also distressed many in David's time; some of the most eminent, who before had been witnesses to the fervency of his devotion, would be nonplussed for a season.

TO SEE THY POWER AND THY GLORY, SO AS I  
HAVE SEEN THEE IN THE SANCTUARY.—  
Psalm lxiii.

CAN any language differ more from that of a worldly man than this? It is impossible for a man who has an aversion to the power of religion, to adopt this strain of speaking, especially as an argument with God in prayer. Light is not more opposite to darkness, nor enmity to love, than this frame of mind to an unregenerate man. Thousands who attend on the worship of God,  
from

from childhood to old age, are utter strangers to this language, and have no more idea of its meaning, than a Turk or Pagan.

Such is the dreadful darkness of our natures that we do not so much as desire to look into the greatest things which God reveals to men. David had experienced the powerful teaching of the Holy Spirit, whereby he had not only seen the truth, but had felt the power of it, upon his own heart: a sure criterion of his being interested in all the blessings of salvation.

We do not find any of king Saul's expressions, which intimate any thing of this nature, yet he was a man of great spirit, and appears to have had great courage and skill for war; he had a heart given him to defend the kingdom by the sword; but any inroads or encroachments made on the worship of God, seemed not to affect him. Gallio like, he cared for none of those things. If this had not been the case, he could not have slain the Lord's priests in the manner he did.

But with what different eyes did David and Saul behold God's sanctuary! David saw it to be the glory of the nation of Israel, and that which distinguished them from all nations under heaven. David's heart is seen in his language; One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the delights of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.

Neither

Neither the immense treasures David was possessed of, nor all the honours of his crown, had such charms for him as God's sanctuary ; no wonder that God should give him that extraordinary character, "*a man after God's own heart.*" For speaking after the manner of men, the very things on which the heart of God himself was set, on these very things was the heart of David fixed. The loving-kindness David discerned in these, was to him more than life itself.

Nothing could give this servant of God such animation and delight, as beholding the great particulars of that Salvation in which he saw himself to be interested. He had not only been made sensible of the greatness of Salvation by a full conviction of his own lost condition by nature, but he had got enlarged ideas of the great design of God in it ; and, therefore, perceived, in a striking manner, how dear the people of God are to himself, which was proved to him to a demonstration, by the greatness of him who had undertaken to give his life a ransom for them : this is the reason why this text in the Hebrew is "*To behold the delights of the Lord, and to enquire, &c.*" i. e. To behold those things in which God had, and would have, his chief delights to all eternity.

If we had eyes given us to see what David saw, we should not be surprised to hear a king

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speak

Speak in such a strain; for what are all those things in which short-sighted mortals take delight, to those infinitely glorious subjects in which Jehovah himself takes pleasure? For the types in the Old Testament-worship had no real value in themselves, yet that which was typified by them, was not only then, but those in which will be, the highest delights of Jehovah to all eternity.

Saul had a great thirst for wordly honour, but was wholly in the dark about that honour which cometh from God only. The services of the sanctuary, though so evidently sanctioned by the solemn authority of God, afforded Saul no satisfaction. That which was said of Eli's sons, might, with great propriety, be applied to Saul, "*he knew not the Lord*," for if any man is wholly ignorant of that in which his neighbour chiefly delights, he is not aware what kind of a man he is; Saul did not perceive that in which God delighted.

It is evident, from the conduct of Saul, that those might take the benefits of the priesthood that would, for him, let him but have riches and honour, and the house of God may be empty, for any thing he cares: we never hear him saying "*I was glad when they said unto me, let us go unto the house of the Lord*." As the hearts of these two men were so conspicuous in their spirit and conduct,



duct, it was the design of God to exhibit and hold out these two characters, like Jacob's and Esau's, to the end of the world, that his dear people may have full conviction that they have not received the spirit of this world. Samuel's company was lightly esteemed by Saul. When the kingdom was secured to himself, Samuel might retire to any place he pleased. How different would the case have been, if David had been favoured, all his life-time, with an acquaintance of such experience; it is not probable that so great a man did exist (after Samuel died) in David's day; but nothing could be more evident, in the life of David, than his heart cleaving to the Lord's people, who were to him the excellent of the earth; and is not this evidently the case with all who are of David's spirit? Such differ as much from the world, as David did from Saul.

Only those who experience the power of God in his sanctuary, can, from the heart, love spiritual worshippers; and there is nothing true christians are more fully persuaded of than this. In Saul, we may perceive what human nature is, when unrenewed; and, in David, we may read the heart of thousands of the people of God. As face answers to face in a glass, so the heart of man to man. Reader, here take a retrospective view of thine own heart; what kind of persons

in and amongst whom has thy heart experienced delight? If thou art a David, of what canst thou be more thoroughly convinced than this, that the company of Christians is thy element, and that worshippers never more engage thy heart, than when they are lively and spiritual in worship?

There are many who experience something of the same spirit which David manifests in this verse, yet understand little or nothing of the cause; the effect is evident; were the cause as distinctly discerned, it would afford a higher pleasure than the present effect; for, though to run in the ways of God's commands is a pleasure beyond any thing that a carnal man can possibly experience, or that even the whole world itself can afford to such, yet, to behold infinite and everlasting love to be the cause why our hearts differ so widely from the carnal world, and to perceive that pleasure which God takes in those who fear him; this is that which will elevate the soul of a child of God to a frame most similar to those heavenly ones who are now surrounding the throne above. It is, therefore, wisdom in Christians to attend minutely to the cause of their religion; this will not only tend to their comfort, but will help them in giving all the glory to God.

We read the truth of the scriptures in men. Two persons shall come from the same habitation to the worship of God; their religious sentiments alike,

alike, but their souls as different as life and death; the heart of one breathing this language, "*my soul thirsts for God!*" the other moves on toward the place with no more principle than the door on its hinges. And can we behold this without glancing at the astonishing cause? "*Who is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord!*" Indeed those who attend not minutely to the cause, neglect giving glory to God; and while they indulge a selfish principle in being desirous of enjoying comfort, and, at the same time, regardless how God is considered or glorified, their comforts are diminished by their unscriptural conduct.

There is scarcely any thing in which true christians differ more evidently from common professors, than in their attendance on public worship. The unregenerate having never felt their lost condition by nature, or discerned the worth of spiritual things, will evidently appear to be possessed of none of those motives which influence the true believer. Having habitually no heart for religion is as easily discerned by others as the living in the neglect of all ordinances is a proof such a man can have no love to God nor religion.

There is scarcely any thing in which the christian may perceive more satisfactorily that he differs from what he himself once was; how

many can say they go the same road, to the same place of worship, but with an understanding as different as light from darkness, with hearts as much changed as the garden from the wilderness. Could Paul, when he went into the temple after his conversion, prevent himself from thinking how he formerly went into that place, and even pity such as he saw blinded, as he remembered himself to have been? Those who have experienced nothing very remarkable in the change which has taken place in them, may yet discern the change as distinctly as they can perceive that of Paul's. And though they were not persecutors, yet they are very sensible they were neglectors of God's salvation.

As it is by the difference there is in the complexion of men, that we are enabled to distinguish one man from another, so there is something in every man whereby we may form a judgment of what spirit he is. The apostle had an eye to this, when he said, "*Know ye not yourselves?*" and "*We have not received the spirit of this world.*"

It would appear singular to see a man attend a market regularly, and go to a considerable distance from his habitation, and we sensible at the same time, that he had not the least prospect either to buy or sell, nor had any particular end  
in



in view ; yet such unaccountable folly is common among professors.

There is nothing in which men act so irrationally as in religion ; a man will not apply to the physician unless he be necessitated ; he will not part with his time or money without some motive ; if, through mistake, he does this once, it shall suffice ; he wishes not to repeat his folly ; but how many poor carnal creatures continue their folly year after year, and without any conviction of either folly or danger ! Men who are possessed of great abilities in natural things, yet will continue from youth to old age in this folly ; and this is not the case of some who are singular, but they are particular and singular persons who act rationally in this important part of conduct ; important it is, for what part of a man's conduct will be attended with such eternal consequences ? In temporal concerns, a man, through inattention, may bring himself to poverty ; and it may be attended with eternal advantage to his soul : But an irrational worshipper plunges both soul and body into everlasting misery. How irrational then must those be who have things of such eternal consequence before them, and yet have no concern or impression of their importance !

This, however, renders it the more easy to distinguish between the formal and the sincere worshipper ; for as the unregenerate live without  
 God

God in the world, whatever profession they make, so it is impossible that such should seek communion with God, who have not the least idea of the pleasure his true worshippers experience.

Worship is a kind of touch-stone; in and by this may be perceived who those are that worship in spirit, and who those are that are secure in the form: and though some timorous souls may be fearful of concluding that they have had no true communion with God in worship, yet they can, with greater certainty, affirm that they seek it and cannot be content without it.

The Jews had a great zeal for the form of religion, long after they had totally lost the power of it; bigotry is like some creatures that will not die soon, though they have received their death's wound.

Many who understand by experience something of David's frame, yet are timorous, and fear to conclude themselves true worshippers; such are greatly injured in their worship, as it is a great help in going to worship to believe God has formed us for it.

I would recommend it to such to take particular notice how impossible it is for unregenerate men, though zealous for the form of religion, to worship God in the spirit, as they evidently see christians worship, and to observe that nothing short of a real change can fit carnal men for  
worshipping

worshipping God. The understandings of such are not only dark, but their internal frame of heart is altogether unfit for such an exercise; as there is an impossibility in a dead corps for performing the actions of a living man, so these dead souls will never praise God till an almighty power quicken them. Such do not only want a suitable frame of mind, and an understanding how to engage in worship, but they are possessed of an enmity against the power of God, of which themselves are not apprehensive.— All who have real experience, know they were before regeneration wholly insensible of their unfitness for the worship of God, and may now perceive themselves formed for worship in such a manner as carnal professors do not perceive.

The objections some serious christians are ready to make on account of finding themselves so frequently out of frame for worship, only make it evident that though their state is immutable, yet their frame is very uncertain; and this is what all experience. If our frame of soul were as immutable as our state, we should not be taught so experimentally what our natures are; it is by this variation that we are taught how weak we are.

The reason why such numbers go on their way drooping, with their hands hanging down, is, in some measure, occasioned by their not attending

attending to that experience which is recorded in the Word of God: if we lightly esteem the means which God himself has appointed, no wonder if the enemy gets an advantage over us. If a soldier in a time of danger leaves his sword behind him, he cannot expect victory. Has God made our hearts to experience the language of this psalm? It is that which he only does for his own children. And can we be more sensible of any thing than we are of this, that it is the desire of our hearts to enjoy those sweet seasons, both in public and private, which we have experienced; and that those to us are infinitely superior to all worldly pleasures.

Though we live by faith in the person of Christ, the grand object of faith, yet as the natural body will soon be weak and infirm without food, so will our souls, without fresh supplies from the fountain-head. Our necessities, as well as our wish, to be comfortable, make us desire time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

The language of David is so expressive of the Christian's experience, that the doubting soul can scarcely cast his eye upon it, without reading his own heart; consequently, is constrained to confess that whether his experience is sound or no, *this very language is his own*; and not only his own, but he is sensible it is a language peculiar to the people of God; nay, he is persuaded,

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in his heart, that he shall never hear any carnal man speak this language from his own experience.

A Christian may be as sensible of the desires of his soul as of the cravings of his body, but he frequently sees not how these prove himself to be born of God. Should he meet with one he had been acquainted with in his carnal state now speaking the language of this psalm, he would be fully persuaded that man was changed from nature to grace.

If all timorous souls would pay more attention to the word, and bring themselves to this touchstone, they might expect the Holy Spirit more frequently to witness with their spirits. It is in the use of appointed means, that he generally meets and encourages those who are waiting upon the Lord. The Psalmist said, "*While I was musing, the fire burned, then spake I with my tongue.*"

How animating and encouraging would it be to a christian, when he is going to the public worship of God, to have positive proof of his being moulded into the mould of the Gospel, when he is as sensible of a change having been made in him, as he is of his own existence. All objections which may arise from the temptations of Satan, and the remains of unbelief, cannot drive him from this, that he is not the man he was ; if he

he dare not say the change is a saving one, he is persuaded it has made him to love those ordinances which are made efficacious to the salvation of many ; and he may safely conclude that change must be a saving one which had made him to say like David, “ *that he prefers the enjoyment of communion with God, and to experience his power in his sanctuary to every other worldly pleasure.* ” This he may be assured is that which cannot be found in any but those who are made partakers of a saving change, therefore, when his frame is at the lowest, when he is either in a doubting or dark frame, or when he seems to himself as if he had lost all those breathings after God he once had ; he may be persuaded of this, he, even then, differs materially from what he was in his carnal state, when he attended a preached gospel, without any expectation of comfort, or the least desire of it, now, though his heart feels very stupid, the language of it is, he longs to obtain that frame he once experienced.

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MY SOUL CLEAVETH UNTO THE DUST.

Psalms cxix.

THIS language may appear strange to young Christians, who have but had a short standing in the church, especially when they, like David, are saying, “ *My mountain stands strong, and I shall*

*shall never be moved.*" But how many have had reason to bless God that ever such experience as is expressed in these words, was ever recorded in scripture ; doubtless the infinite mercy and compassion of God has been seen and noticed in this, by thousands who are now in glory. They will remember to eternity the relief they found when they saw the hearts of eminent saints to be like their own.

It is evident that this is the language of a child of God, for the more the unregenerate man cleaveth to the earth, the more he is in his element, especially if he has prosperity in his pursuits ; for him to complain of his heart cleaving to the earth, would be inconsistent. His delight being only in the things of this world, it is impossible he should feel such soul complaints ; he is a total stranger to either soul necessities, or spiritual pleasures.

This proves that the man who speaks, from his heart, this language, must be born of God ; it is only the christian who can, with any propriety, adopt this language ; and as face answers to face in a glass, so this is a complaint common to all experimental christians.

That which renders the christian so unhappy in this frame is, his being alarmed with apprehensions that he shall never obtain his former consolations ; and also he fears it is a proof that

he never had any real spiritual life ; the frame itself is a grievous burden to him, but the fear and suspicion which it occasions, often render it almost insupportable.

This language being so common to all, ought rather to prove to the christian, that such as are speaking in this strain, belong to that company who have spoken it in every age ; for as we form ideas of wicked men by their conversation, so, especially when we hear persons speaking in a strain in which no carnal men ever spoke, not even professors of religion, if they were unacquainted with the power of it, we cannot but hope that such have been taught from above : From whence can such soul complaints originate, but from him that quickeneth those who were dead in trespasses and sins ?

This complaint is merely a soul complaint, and, therefore, wholly different from those troubles which worldly men experience ; their souls being spiritually dead, no complaints of this kind are heard from them, any more than from dead bodies in their graves ; for if such hear of either the joys of christians, or of those difficulties which distress many of God's children, they are not only ignorant of them, but this stirs up their enmity, which proves their ignorance of such complaints.



Offer a christian in this distressed situation, any thing which adorns the body, or suits the appetite, or enriches his estate, his drooping spirit is not at all alleviated by any of these. As honours and pleasures will not suit a man in dying circumstances, so these have nothing in them to comfort or cheer a believer. It must be something spiritual which will satisfy the desires of a renewed soul ; and this is one thing which proves it to be made alive spiritually, for those who are dead in sin, seek not spiritual comforts.

The christian has learned an *advantageous* lesson, when he sees that even his wants and complaints prove him to be a child of God ; this will make his seasons of desertion, as well as times of spiritual enjoyments, tend to his instruction ; and as winter winds tend to establish and strengthen the tree, so do these an experienced believer.

Many christians who are adopting the language of this text, have no suspicion about their being in a state of grace ; they are fully persuaded that once they mounted on wings as eagles, and though now, like Job, they are saying, "*Oh, that I were as in months past, as the days when God preserved me ; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness.*" Job xxix. 2, 3. Yet they hope those precious

seasons will return ; this keeps them from desponding fears.

But believing our state to be right, yea, being assured of it, will not, of itself, draw out our hearts to God, without the influence of the Holy Spirit ; the more knowledge we have, the more we shall be sensible of the absolute need we stand in of his divine aid ; for being delivered from fear will not, of itself, kindle our desires ; this makes it evident, that when our hearts are enlarged, we are then under the influences of the Holy Spirit.

The believer being in this frame of soul, may not be owing to any particular temptation to sin, but to that neglect or trifling in private prayer which is so common to all christians, and which is the inlet to most of our troubles. Few keep in mind those words of Christ, "*Abide in me, and I in you ; as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*" John xv. 4.

As the body requires a constant supply for its support, to render it comfortable, so the renewed soul must have spiritual supplies for its nourishment and growth in grace, and this is given in use of means. Israel must gather the manna ; though rained about their tents, it did not fall into their mouths. An indolent spirit is very injurious to the christian ; the first advantage the  
grand

grand enemy gains over the believer, is by tempting him to neglect his closet, this opens a flood-gate to a variety of sins, and sorrow follows sin as the shadow the substance.

God over-rules even such difficulties as these for our good ; though christians, in this frame, are rendered very uncomfortable for a season, yet are taught experimentally their own weakness, and when God is pleased to grant them his gracious influences, they are the more sensible from whence such comforts are derived ; so abundantly gracious is our God, that he over-rules even our provoking sins to the enlarging of our experience of his bowels of mercies ; this is so far from encouraging the renewed soul to sin, that it is at some seasons filled with gratitude in the contemplation of such free and infinite love. How did David cry out, *And is this after the manner of men, O Lord God?*

Many christians are so circumstanced in the world, that their minds are, in a measure, chained down to the surface of the earth by cares and toil, and this from morning to evening ; some are necessitated to be in very disagreeable company ; like Lot, they are weary with the conversation of the wicked. Such, though they complain of their souls cleaving to the dust, yet when they have opportunity to engage in spiritual exercises, and meet with a time of refreshing

from the presence of the Lord, the weary traveller is not more sensible of receiving strength and spirits for his journey by rest and food, than those experience at such seasons—retirement how sweet ! how welcome ! The safe and calm harbour cannot make the feelings of the tossed mariner more comfortable, than a place of retirement from the noise and bustle of this world !

The difference between an antipathy to the power of religion, and an earnest desire of the life and spirit of it, is so great, that when properly noticed, it is of great advantage to the real christian. Those who are called by grace, may call to mind, that when they were ignorant of real religion, they were so far from choosing lively and active christians for their companions, that it was far more agreeable to them to keep at a distance from them, than to court the least intimacy ; but how different when changed by grace ! This does not merely respect persons, but religion in general. In attendance on ordinances, they had no experience of being refreshed by them, or any such expectation ; now the change made in them is discerned both by themselves and others.

And even christians, who are not so much encumbered with the things of the world, it is not so much matter of surprise, if we consider how natural it is for our hearts to cleave to the things  
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of time ; how opposite to the divine life the love of the world is, and how common it is for christians, after their first love, being off their guard, to plunge themselves into the world ; is it at all to be wondered at, that many find themselves in this frame before they are aware ? How true is that saying, *the heart is deceitful, and desperately wicked !*

Inform but a traveller that highwaymen haunt such a place, and he will be sure to have his thoughts about him, when near the place of danger ; but christians, after they have been plundered again and again, walk in an uncautious manner. If we acted as unwisely for our bodies as we do in spiritual things, we should soon plunge ourselves into ruin.

This frame, described in those words, is wholly different from the language of worldly distress ; how many who meet with nothing in the world but a series of disappointments and distresses of almost every kind ; and, according to reason, have nothing better to expect to their dying moments : yet nothing like this language ever drops from their lips ; some experience the total loss of all natural comforts ; the severest bodily pains, or prisons, will not extort any such complaint from an unregenerate man : it is neither the sweet and charming voice of the gospel that will draw him ; nor will the dreadful effects  
of

of sin drive him to seek for happiness in God. All this proves how much the true christian differs from the men of this world.

Reader, has this complaint been thine? thou can'st not live estranged from God like worldly professors; thy happiness is in communion with God, deprived of this, no worldly entertainments can supply the loss; thy frame may be bad, but thy state is safe; the desires of thy soul prove thee to be born from above.

Think how many thousands are now in glory, who once with great distress, spoke thy very heart. They are got above the reach of all complaints now, and art not thou as sensible of this being at times the language of thy heart, as that thou art acquainted with any natural complaints, remember that soul must be spiritually alive, that experiences spiritual sensations: it is a living man, who is sensible of the cravings of an hungry appetite.

Thus we see there are many of the complaints of God's people, which as fully prove them to be born of God, as their most elevated joys, and those would never seek for the quickning influences of the Holy Spirit, if they had not been taught by experience both the necessity and the comfort, which believers enjoy by having their souls drawn out to God. It is possible to form ideas of some natural pleasures of which we never were partakers, because these are natural to

us, but we are not only ignorant of spiritual pleasures, but have an enmity to them.

The difference between the frame of mind expressed in this text and that dead frame in which thousands and tens of thousands, of wordly professors live, is as much as between life and death; the one has no uneasiness of a spiritual nature, except his false confidence be shaken by some sin, when that is the case, he betakes himself to his accustomed method of daubing with untempered mortar, and when that is done, which he supposes will suffice, he enjoys his security again, and we hear no more of his complaints, all he wants is ease from an accusing conscience, not nearness to God, and to live in communion with him.

But the true christian, when his frame is at the lowest ebb, it is not keeping from sin that will give him any content, though he may for a season trifle in his closet, yet, he having experienced more happy seasons, knows he is not in the frame he either can live or die in with comfort; nothing can give him content short of the enjoyment of those comfortable enlargements, he has once experienced. Where is the man who has once enjoyed the sweets of liberty, that can be happy in chains and slavery?

The true believer has an experimental acquaintance with the necessity of the operations of  
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the Holy Spirit; the carnal professor has no understanding of any such thing, therefore of consequence, seeks not for it, and cannot lament the loss of it; he therefore is not distressed like the experimental christian.

From all this, we are fully convinced of the words of Christ, *I will send you the Holy Ghost, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him.*

Carnal professors are but men of the world, they have not the spirit of Christ, and therefore are none of his, nor do they drink into the spirit of those who are his.

We may also see from these things, that many carnal men, from common conviction, begin to attend to religion, and being convinced from the scripture that salvation is by Christ, these may soon learn to speak many things about Christ, while they are as great strangers to the operations of the Holy Spirit, as any men in the world; but being sensible that they differ from the world at large, and perceive they have more knowledge than those who are buried in gross ignorance, these may deceive themselves by concluding that they are born of God.

All this proves to a demonstration that it is only those who are truly born of God, who understand the operations of the Holy Spirit. These, and these only, seek the enjoyment of God in religion,  
and



and as they have had great pleasure when their hearts have been enlarged, no wonder they complain when they experience the loss of their comforts ; but if such a one were as much assured of his state being safe, as he is of his frame being uncomfortable, his frame would not so much distress him.

A christian who if fully persuaded of his state being safe, though he be in an uncomfortable frame, is more encouraged to plead with God for those mercies he needs, than one who on account of his frame, is writing bitter things against himself, and fears, because he has not that nearness to God which he wishes, that God is an enemy.

It must be of great advantage to the christian when he can perceive that even his complaints are undeniable evidences of his being a child of God ; this helps him to believe that he who has of his own infinite love, made him a child, will exercise pity and compassion towards him, according to his character, which is that of a father, who cannot but have compassion on his children.

As a saving knowledge of God must come from himself, so must that wisdom which will enable the christian to see the kindness of God, which discovered, is the way that he leads his own to glory.

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Had we but a little knowledge of our guilt, we should not so highly prize the atonement, and could we have such a happy carrying on which we should suppose would be very comfortable, we should only in theory believe in the Holy Ghost; but when we are made sensible how weak we are, by feeling the power of the remains of sin, we are taught experimentally to war against sin, depending only on divine assistance. It is this which will make a christian say from his heart, *Oh wretched man that I am!—and I will go in the strength of the Lord.*

When we have felt by experience for a considerable time, how unable we are to perform that which is good, then when divine aid is given, it is peculiarly sweet.

Thus the very things which appear at first, to be against us, in the issue turn out to our advantage, and we find our very complaints are evidences of our natures being changed.

DRAW ME, WE WILL RUN AFTER THEE.

Sol. Song i. 3.

IT is impossible for any of the fallen race, while they remain in ignorance and enmity either to understand this language, or pray this prayer. If we take a view either of the formal professor,

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or the men of the world at large ; we shall find them as distant from such a frame of mind, as this prayer demonstrates, as death is from life ; so destitute are all the unregenerate from apprehending the meaning of this petition, they would be alarmed should any of their fellow creatures begin to make use of it.

When persons are ignorant of that which is most universally known to all experimental christians, it is evident such persons must be total strangers to real christianity, and while we prove to a demonstration, the universal ignorance of all unregenerate men, the christian is more and more enabled to perceive the difference which God has made in himself ; for the change which is made by regeneration is spiritual, by which a christian is capacitated to form a judgement both of himself and the world. *But he that is spiritual judgeth all things*, 1 Cor. ii. xv.

This prayer is something more than words ; such a prayer put up in sincerity, is nothing less than the heart going out after God ; the desires of the heart are even felt in the language by those who have spiritual understanding, and such divine breathings are rarely so much as heard by christians, but their efficacy is experienced by those who hear them, for as iron sharpens iron, so these tend to rouse and quicken those who have experience : grace in exercise, is like some excellent per-  
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fumes,

fumes, you cannot come near them, but you partake of their sweet flavour.

These words exhibit a christian not only desirous of pursuing his journey, but sensible of his inability to make progress without divine assistance, which is a further proof of spiritual life; especially as many set out like the foolish virgins, and being unacquainted with experience, are insensible of that need, which the real christian finds; therefore these are not the words of one who is out of the path, but one who is in the right way, but cannot make that progress he wishes; he both sees the way, and understands how he ought to walk in it, but experiencing an utter inability in himself, he implores that divine assistance which a gracious God has been granting to his people in every age.

There is a running in the christian race with which the experimental christian is only acquainted. The believer having once tasted the sweetness of such a frame, he ardently petitions to enjoy the same pleasure again; this is owing to an internal cause, which is in the heart of every child of God, and which will powerfully influence him, when all terrors and fears of hell are wholly vanished.

The christian in this circumstance feels the force of those words of Christ, *Without me, ye can do nothing.* The frame of mind he wishes to attain



tain to, is as much beyond his power, as to grasp the heavens with his hand ; but though out of his reach, he is sensible the way to obtain what he so much desires, is prayer. Inability should not discourage us when we have more than leave to ask for all necessary assistance. God never intended to make his children independant of himself.

Unregenerate persons may learn to use expressions in prayer, and especially in bodily pain and affliction ; they may cry out for ease, but it is only the children of God, who experience a praying heart, and who can plead for the influence of the Holy Ghost, and to them this is as natural as for the new born babe to desire the breast. If the timorous soul was fully satisfied in this respect, and thoroughly understood the frame of his own heart, it would afford him great relief.

The christian meets with many things to incumber and retard him in his race ; he is often made to cry out, *O, that I had wings as a dove.* He is but renewed in part, therefore his heart is prone to be drawn aside with the things of this world ; being sensible of this, makes him pray for that drawing, which will enable him to mount up above the things of time.

The heart breathing this language, proves a person to be spiritually alive, as much as motion demonstrates the body to be naturally alive, be-

cause of its being so opposite to that which unregenerate men love, who are so far from desiring to be drawn near to spiritual things, they have the utmost aversion to them.

True religion having the heart for its seat, this prayer may with the greatest propriety, be called the language of the heart ; it is a petition which the believer cannot always with propriety use, but only when his desires are in some measure drawn out after God, 'tis then he feels his heart breath this language ; at other times he cannot pray this prayer from his heart, though he laments the frame which he feels.

As poverty or pain induces a person to exert himself for relief, so a sense of spiritual want will cause a believer both to pray and use the means. The Holy Spirit often gives a soul a sense of its wants, before he draws out the heart in prayer to God for a supply : relief for the most part is near, when the christian has his heart panting for the water brooks.

There can be no honest complaint, where there is no sense of want or pain ; therefore, though a hypocrite may utter a prayer in words like the sincere soul, his heart goes not along with his words.

The prayers of the unregenerate, originate from a cause quite different from that by which experimental christians are influenced ; if they  
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can but perform something which they suppose is their duty, and which if neglected, might endanger their eternal welfare, they rest secure ; but the true christian having a peculiar delight in communion with God, the cause by which he is influenced, is infinitely higher ; he prays not merely to escape hell, he is seeking to enjoy a part of heaven below.

It would appear strange to hear an unregenerate man use the same expressions which David frequently uttered from his heart, *Quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word* ; and why was it not matter of surprise, to hear David speak in this strain, because it was suitable to other parts of his conduct, in which it was evident his delight was in God.

Christians are the only persons who understand those words of Christ, *The wind bloweth where it listeth* ; they experience a sovereignty in the operations of the Holy Spirit ; when the christian is pleading for his divine influences, he understands by experience, that divine drawings depend on the sovereign will of God.

There are some words in which carnal persons may mimic true christians, but there are others, which are impossible to be uttered in that frame of spirit, and manner in which the people of God speak them ; such are the words of this text. Those who are strangers to the power of

religion, are totally ignorant how the believer feels in thus pouring out his soul to God, whereas all experimental christians have a distinct idea of the experience of a christian in this frame.

Spiritual life causes a language peculiar to itself; the christian is not only a person possessed of a new heart, but a new spirit in prayer; he has got a new errand to a throne of grace, which is of great importance to his present comfort, as well as future happiness. Those who are ignorant of spiritual wants, only borrow their language, but the christian's prayer is formed by the feelings of his heart.

When the christian can read his true character in all his frames, he then is enabled to plead the promise with some degree of boldness in a season of darkness. It is a great encouragement to the believer in asking, when he is positively persuaded he should never have understood the necessity of divine drawings, had he not been savingly taught by the Spirit; now he not only desires to be drawn, but he understands how a christian feels when he is drawn.

As the body is rarely without some motion which evidences it to be a living body, so the renewed soul will give some proof of its spiritual life, which if the christian has a discerning eye he may be as fully persuaded of his divine life as he is of his natural, and who can describe that  
happiness



happinefs which fuch a certainty would caufe in  
thoufands?

This prayer differs materially from that which  
is the mere effect of bodily trouble or affliction ;  
how many are there, whose pains are almoft in-  
tollerable to an obferver, and though fuch may  
pray in their manner, yet they have nothing of the  
breathing which is evidently feen in this fcrip-  
ture. This is the language of one who defires  
to enjoy fomething of heaven in his way thither,  
not of one affrighted with the fears of hell.  
Reader, narrowly look into thyfelf, if the breath-  
ing of foul discoverable in this fcripture has been  
repeatedly thine. The Holy Ghoft has regene-  
rated thee, and will never leave drawing thy foul  
till he has brought thee where prayer fhall be  
heard no more.

It is evident from univerfal experience, that  
grace is more certainly defcribed by wants, de-  
fires and complaints, than by the higheft joys  
with which any of the children of God are fa-  
voured. David never gave fuch pofitive proof  
of his being a fpiritual man, as he did in his  
deepeft complaints.

A chriitian who humbly depends on the affif-  
tance of the Holy Spirit, will hold on in his  
way to Zion, when many flaming profefors will  
fink into oblivion. How many who have thought  
little of themfelves, and almoft adored fome  
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whom they have heard to relate their joys, yet they have lived to see those flaming torches emerfed in the ocean of fin and wickednefs.

If this text is frequently the language of thy heart, it is that which is not to be found in the heart of any unregenerate man in the world; thefe underftand what it is to be drawn after the world, with its profits or pleasures, but this frame they are wholly ignorant of.

It is only real christians who dread being drawn away with the world; it is their prayer that nothing may be injurious to their fouls. This makes them have that jealousy over their hearts, which is only to be found in thofe who have real experience.

Nothing is more common than for fome perfone to think highly of themfelves, and to boast of the goodnefs of their own hearts; but the christian, who has been ftiving every way to engage his heart, fometimes has called to mind the dreadful and awful fubjects, and fometimes the moft engaging and endearing ones, but finds that no confideration whatever, will draw out his foul after God; he not only thinks, but is hard to be perfuaded that others have fuch a heart as he has got; it is fuch perfons as thefe, who pray with fincerity for divine drawings.

What is the reafon perfons who differ fo much from the world, cannot fee that they are not of it?

it? If they experienced joys as frequently as they feel their wants, they would have no fears about their state.

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OH ! THAT I WERE AS IN MONTHS PAST.

Job xxix. 2.

FEW mortals ever experienced such an astonishing change as Job ; and, for a considerable time, we have not the least intimation of a complaint ; on the contrary, he breathes out the frame of his heart in these words : “ *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord.* ” This did not only prove to a demonstration, that he had grace, but that he was eminent for the exercise of it. Submission is one of the highest fruits in the tree of christianity ; there is nothing to which our natures are more averse. Nothing but divine assistance could have helped Job to speak in such a strain.

Afflictions of every kind have been borne with resignation, and sometimes the presence of God has caused the christian even to sing in the fire ; but what man under heaven could ever bear desertion without complaint ? Even the Son of God himself, was made to cry out, “ *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?* ” Job, in these words

words, is not crying out for his children, but for the return of those gracious visits from God with which he had been indulged.

If a small difficulty has made an eminent soldier of Christ to shrink, when it has pleased God to withdraw his supporting presence, shall we be surprized to hear Job speak in this mournful strain, when we consider that he was deprived of all his former comforts, and brought into a situation, which neither himself nor friends, had so much as ever heard of any distress that could be compared to his.

This complaint was evidently occasioned by the loss of his spiritual comfort ; David could sing in the midst of danger, while he enjoyed the sun-shine of God's presence ; but when he was deprived of the light of God's countenance, he cries out, "*Thou hidest thy face, and I am troubled!*" Experimental christians only can form a just idea of such complaints as these ; distresses of a worldly nature are common—David says, "*There be many who are saying, who will show us any good?*" but it is only renewed souls who desire the light of God's countenance, and therefore they only will lament when they are deprived of the enjoyment of it.

Job does not seem to call in question his state, but when that is not the case, it is peculiarly afflicting, especially when under heavy trials, to

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be destitute of that light and comfort which is necessary for a believer in his common walk. Never was any man in a situation which required more supernatural assistance than that of Job; he had not only been brought suddenly down from the highest pinnacle of honours into the most abject poverty, but his body was afflicted in a manner unknown before to any mortal; and in the depth of all this trial to be deserted, was enough to make the most eminent saint cry out.

It has been peculiarly satisfactory to thousands, when they have distinctly perceived that God has tried some of his most eminent servants with the withdrawing of his presence; and especially when they have been in great difficulties, this affords some relief in that suspicion common to all christians: "*If I was loved, I could not be treated thus!*" remove but this from the heart of a believer, and much is done towards his comfort. When we are persuaded those very difficulties with which we are exercised, are only such as are common to those who are the most highly favoured, it tends to soothe our fears, and mitigate all other complaints; no suspicion is more grievous to the tried soul, than that such dreadful afflictions fall not to the lot of those who are highly favoured of the Lord.

Job, in this text, has spoke the feelings of tens of thousands, who have experienced as great

a vicissitude in spiritual things as himself; though having never been so highly exalted in temporals, renders it impossible for them to have experienced so great a fall as Job in the loss of all their outward comforts; but when there is nothing of a temporal nature to increase the burden, the loss of spiritual consolation has made many feeble knees.

It is an advantage we are not sufficiently apprized of, that we have such a clear view of the conduct of God towards his people in their most trying seasons; we acquire a knowledge of God by his ways and works, as well as by his word; and, indeed, his conduct in this respect, carries something in it more than words. His wisdom and love shine in the most striking facts, which instruct most effectually.

Though there be few who have travelled any considerable time in the way to Zion, but they have adopted Job's language, yet they have an advantage Job was not favoured with; he had not the experience of a man set before him, who had been in a situation similar to his own, but we have the distresses of many, which far exceed any of ours, and of such persons of whom we cannot entertain the least suspicion of their being the children of God.

The change from the heat of summer to the chilling colds of January, are not more sensibly felt,

felt, than what the christian experiences in the change of his frame ; but we have, in the case of Job, the fullest proof of this comfortable truth, that great as the change was which Job experienced, he was in the hands of an unchangeable Jehovah, who pitied him as a father his son who serveth him.

Many have reflected on past seasons of private devotion both with real pleasure and pungent sorrow, but could they see themselves in a more scriptural view, both their seasons of darkness, as well as of light, would have afforded matter of joy.

When the christian remembers, that once his heart was at his closet before his body, he entered the retired place with expectation and avidity ; if any thing prevented him, the moments were spent in impatience ; he could be grieved even when things that were advantageous to his worldly interests interrupted or prevented him from enjoying his opportunities of retirement ; no worldly gain could make up for the loss of spiritual enjoyments. But how affecting the change, when all the arguments he can heap together, and all the charges he can bring against himself of ingratitude and neglect, will not move his heart one step towards God ? Had any friend intimated his heart had been, or would be, thus

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deceitful,

deceitful, he would have answered as Hadad to the prophet, "*Is thy servant a dog?*"

But now he that once mounted up as on eagles' wings, is sunk in the mire of sloth and worldly affections, a change he once thought impossible ; it is in this frame, that the believer can say, "*In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing!*"

When by conscience he is constrained to go into his closet, how backward and formal ! The conviction has only been the more keen, by the performance ; and duty performed has only proved to himself the wickedness of his heart.

This is winter season to the soul, cold and dark ; is it then any matter of surprize to hear one in such a situation cry out, *Oh ! that I were as in months past!* How different to run full of life and love, to meet a gracious covenant-keeping God, with a heart enlarged, from being filled with dreadful apprehensions of his frowns, because of our shameful frame of heart.

This complaint is not confined to the closet ; it is like the plague, every part is affected by it ! When the heart is out of tune, all spiritual things have lost their relish ; though the christian, in his judgment, is the same towards them, yet he feels a backwardness to apply for the enjoyment of them.

With what pleasure did the christian once run to hear the word ; his soul longed for the courts  
of



of the Lord's house ; his language was, *When shall I come and appear before God?* He felt himself out of patience with those who only appeared languid in the worship, or that for trivial excuses would neglect the means of grace.

How great the change! Now all arguments with his lukewarm heart lose their force ; all relish for the word seems gone ; the service that once was far too short, is now intollerably tedious ; is it a wonder that such, when they are not wholly left to an obdurate and insensible frame, to hear such an one cry out, *Oh ! that I were as in months past !* If we have no sense of the ingratitude and sin of such a frame, the very great difference there is in the christian's present comfort between mounting up with wings as an eagle, and having his feet fast in the stocks, would make him speak the language of Job.

Let it be further observed, that the believer could once meet difficulty as David met Goliath in the name of the Lord his God ; he seemed possessed of a faith which would bear him up under any difficulty ; this appears to have been David's frame when he says, *My mountain stands strong, and I shall never be moved !* But now every diminutive hill is magnified into a huge mountain, and every Canaanite is a tall son of Anack.

The christian is now like Samson, with his locks shaven ; he is an easy prey to the malicious

enemy ; could we see the experience of millions, we should find the broken bones, many have complained of to their graves, have been the effect of lukewarmness. In this frame, the believer is so far from the christian's triumph, *We are more than conquerors, through him that loved us*, that it is the very reverse with him ; the road appears full of difficulties, too hard to be borne. Many who at one time have not feared to face a lion or a Goliath, when in a different frame, would be frightened with the shaking of a leaf.

When the christian remembers that his heart was at one time so engaged in heavenly things, that riches and honours had no charms ; he pitied those who were carried down the stream with such empty vanities, and blessed God that he was no longer bound with those chains. He could look back on many snares which the enemy had laid to captivate his soul, but the great things of eternity outbalanced all such delusive enchantments.

But now the heart, once dead to the world, makes him tremble to find it cleaving to the things of time and sense ; he is so apprehensive of its bias, he dreads the least temptation ; he stands in awe of many things he once supposed it impossible his heart could ever be ensnared with again !

The christian thought once all corruption seemed washed away ; he viewed his former besetting sins, as the Israelites did the Egyptians dead on the shore ; but how grievous this mistake ! They not only are alive, but return with double strength.

This, above all other complaints, is the most grievous ; says the christian, *Shall I indulge that which nailed the Lord of Glory to the cross ?* Ten thousand jealousies and suspicions are often occasioned by some hidden corruption, with which the believer imagined he should have no more trouble.

Such difficulties will often make the believer cry out, like Rebecca, *Why am I thus ?*

The christian can reflect on past seasons in which he had most pleasing thoughts of God, and of a covenant of grace ; he could sit down in some retired spot, regale his spirits, and almost ascend to the borders of heaven. But how great the change ! Both light and knowledge seem fled, and this bright morning succeeded by a gloomy evening ! Divine Love is veiled behind a thick, impenetrable cloud ! What instruction will such a feeling lesson afford ; it will constrain us to acknowledge that nothing can give us just ideas of our own weakness or wickedness, but experience. Humility is not the product of mere theory, but is obtained by painful experience.

The language of many young christians, who like David are saying, *My mountain stands strong*, may be compared to those who fight victorious battles by the fire side; where the art and force of the enemy, is neither seen nor felt.

Could the christian perceive distinctly, amidst all these complaints, that his state is safe, that these are but the difficulties others have had to struggle with, his faith would not be shaken.

In all these heavy complaints, there is not the least symptom of one drawing back to perdition; a soul that complains of its distance from God, and desires nothing more than to be restored to the light of his countenance, is a lover of God.

Though such may be long exercised with these difficulties, they will assuredly experience, *Though sorrow may endure for a night, yet joy comes in the morning.*

Though the christian at such seasons, cannot pray or read, and hear the word with that satisfaction he wishes, yet he retains a high esteem for divine ordinances.

Though he does not in this perplexed condition, experience the joy and pleasure he once enjoyed, he was never more determined to wait on the Lord in his own appointments.

It is a satisfaction when our complaints evidently appear to be such as the people of God only are acquainted with. Had Job been a stranger



stranger to God, all his distress would have been about his riches and children, but the complaint expressed in this text, is of another nature.

Times of worldly prosperity are sooner forgot, than remarkable seasons of spiritual joy. Jacob did not mention the increase of his cattle, which once so much exercised his mind, but he calls Bethel to mind, even in his dying moments.

WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE PASSED FROM  
DEATH TO LIFE, BECAUSE WE LOVE  
THE BRETHREN.

I John iii. 14.

HOWEVER this text may have been mistaken by some, it is no argument that it should not be of that service to the church which the Holy Ghost designed; for if this scripture be not of use to the christian, by way of evidence, I cannot see of what comfort it may be to any of the people of God. If any part of divine revelation must be set aside on account of its having been abused, we may treat the whole with neglect.

There is so great a difference between religious and carnal affections, which, if observed, will give peculiar satisfaction to the christian, and greatly assist him in examining himself. Good and bad fruit cannot be more easily distinguished, than

than religious and carnal affections, when properly tried by the word of God.

Let it be observed, that nothing is more common, than for persons, who love the same kinds of diversion, to unite together, whether those pleasures are natural, or spiritual: this verifies the old proverb: *Birds of a feather, will flock together.*

But, as natural pleasures are not of such great importance as heavenly and eternal things, the effects of common amusements are not so binding and immutable, as those of a higher nature: for instance, if a man be peculiarly attached to music, he will find others, who love the same science, seeking intimacy with him; which would not be the case had he a violent aversion to such a pleasing amusement. It is the very same with other kinds of diversions: The angler will find those who are fond of that diversion, seeking his acquaintance; this does not altogether arise from a desire of farther information, but from a respect such will entertain for a man of the same taste with himself.

But the affection mentioned in this verse, differs wholly from all natural regards; for, although there appears something similar in christians loving the same subjects, yet there are higher motives which excite the christian's affections, than can possibly be found in things merely natural.

natural. To suppose this description of love, which John gives, is of no use, because it is common for persons, who are of the same sect, or sentiment, to have a respect for each other, to me, appears not only ridiculous, but finding fault with the Holy Ghost; by such a method, many important texts of scripture would be rendered useless, if this mode of treating scripture be once admitted.

Is it a thing impossible for a christian to distinguish between natural affection, and the love he experiences for the people of God? The regard he feels to christians, arises not from any natural ties or worldly advantage; so far from this, that they are frequently such whose necessities require his assistance.

And suppose carnal men and hypocrites deceive themselves, and conclude they are God's children, merely because they love those with whom they are connected by party or sentiment, must the child of God be deprived of comfort because of these? No doubt many have thus deceived themselves. The foolish virgins probably had a greater respect for those who were like themselves, than for the wise.

The ordinance of the Lord's supper is more universally abused, than any particular text of scripture; and shall the people of God be robbed of such an ordinance because hypocrites abuse it?

Many

Many have even thought too slightly of spiritual consolations, because Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, and also because some who have boasted of great comforts, have proved hypocrites.

John saw that those to whom he wrote, stood in need of this very method of reasoning. Many of them had, no doubt, been distressed with the falling away of great numbers, chap. ii. 19. *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us, &c.*

Some may object and say, what comfort could this method of reasoning afford to any of them, seeing those very persons who fell away, loved their brethren, But is not this finding fault with the Holy Ghost who inspired John thus to write? *We know, &c. because we love the brethren.*

No doubt but they might have an affection for those, but had they examined it, it would have been proved to be carnal, and not spiritual affection.

However it cannot be denied, but that John did write these words, and for this very end, that the children of God might know that they had eternal life; therefore to apply the text to the very same purpose which the Holy Ghost had in view, is to me very satisfactory.

As



As the Holy Ghost is called by way of eminence, the Comforter, and one of his methods of comforting is by describing spiritual affections, and those as differing entirely from all kinds of natural regards; and the discerning of this, is that which assists the christian to understand his own state, in such a manner that he may say, *I know I am passed from death, &c.* It proves to a demonstration that this very evidence was satisfactory to John himself, and by him held forth for the comfort and satisfaction of others.

All other kinds of affection come in a natural way, and are easily accounted for, but this is very different to what the christian himself experienced before his being born of God.

This makes it evident that this scripture was in a peculiar manner, intended for this very thing, and as such, those who are passed from death unto life, ought to read their own characters in it.

Suppose any number of unregenerate persons should be united together, as much as it is possible for carnal men to be by any natural amusements, should an individual of such a company, by some alarming providence, or sermon, fall into great distress on account of sin, and begin to be very diligent in his attendance on the word of God, though he might retain a natural respect for his old companions on some accounts, yet when his heart was changed to love divine things, he  
would

would find a material difference betwixt the affection he has for these, and that which he entertains for God's children.

This man would not only find himself differ from the rest, but they would soon make him feel their disapprobation, and resentment. And he would now as naturally search for godly companions, as the others would dislike his company ; thus he would feel a sensible change in his affections. So when Paul was called, he left those with whom he had been connected, and his heart became united to the people of God.

It has frequently been the case, that those who have been the most affectionately attached to each other by natural things, will imbibe the greatest antipathy against each other, when those natural ties are broken. Yet this resentment does not arise on the christians part, but on the side of the unregenerate, on account of their losing the company of those, for whom they had so high an esteem, and this being on account of religion, excites their enmity against the ways of God the more.

This is occasioned by that enmity which is common to all ungodly men. Carnal men are not only dead to God spiritually, but the carnal mind is enmity against him, and such will hate a man, entirely on account of religion, though  
otherwise

otherwise he is every way an agreeable and worthy character.

This is a positive proof that there is not merely a want of love in every unrenewed man, but a dreadful enmity, not easily to be described; and this should be a striking proof to those who are possessed of Christian love, and confirm them in this, *i. e.* that their being made partakers of such a change, could never have originated with themselves, no more than the love which Paul had to the churches, had its rise in his corrupt nature.

Let any of those who are born of God, meet an old acquaintance, who had formerly been walking after the course of this world, but begins to ask the way to Zion; this is so far from raising in them, any thing like resentment, it kindles a flame of love in them immediately. He who thus loveth, is born of God. Many who have known this to be their own case, will remember how they courted the company of such, and experienced more than a willingness to afford them all the assistance in their power. If such a man was respected by them before, their affection is now increased ten fold.

This affection will appear unaccountable to the men of this world, because experimental christians, and they only, are the persons who can form the least idea of this powerful attraction. The ungodly would gladly ascribe it to any base

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cause.

cause. If they cannot to worldly advantage, it is either pride or some other mean and low motive, but the cause is wholly of God. *If any man would give all the substance in his house for this love, it would be utterly condemned.* Cant. viii. 7.

This love is not merely on account of sentiment or agreement in all particulars in religion, but is of a nature far superior to all outward things. The christian himself can more easily tell that he loves, than describe how, or in what manner he feels.

Many professors who are sound in sentiment and scriptural in many particulars of religion, yet they are so far from kindling this affection in christians, that they only distress and injure them. Many have great reason to wish they had never seen some professors; while, on the other hand, the spirits of such who are but setting out in the ways of God, though in general they then build upon the foundation, wood and hay and stubble, yet are as iron which sharpens iron.

There is therefore no occasion for serious persons to suspect whether or no, they only respect affectionate christians, because of something natural. Is it not evident to a demonstration, that unless they themselves had been born of God, they would have hated the very men their hearts now cleave unto.

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The love mentioned by John is not to be found in any individual in the whole world, except in those who are plants of the father's planting. If it were possible that it should be in one unregenerate man, it could never be once more brought in as a test of true christianity.

The Holy Ghost mentions this affection, as that by which all christians may be distinguished from others ; these are of God, and the whole world besides lieth in the wicked one, 1 John v. xix. He that thus loveth is positively born of God, and is passed from death unto life, and will give proof of this by loving the children of God.

Therefore before any man can be possessed of real love to the people of God, he must first have drunk into their spirit, and tasted of their pleasure, or he would never have felt his heart united to them. As soon shall we see dead men perform living actions, as natural and unconverted men cleaving in affection to God's people.

The more lively and affectionate the christian is, the more engaging he is to one who is born of God. *And every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.* 1 John v. i. The true christian is not only persuaded that he loves a child of God, but that his love is excited by the idea of such a man belonging to God's family. This proves to a demonstration, that the

enmity in such a man is not only slain, but that a new principal is implanted in his heart.

Ruth could not bear the thought of being deprived of Naomi's company. She might have many near relations, and dear to her by the ties of nature, which she left in the land of Moab, yet they were all outbalanced by one true Israelite. She chose rather to endure poverty in the land of Israel in Naomi's company, than enjoy riches with all her relations in her own country. The whole world appears empty to christians when they are deprived of the people of God and his worship. Ruth had got such a taste for the things of God, that the whole kingdom of Moab was nothing when compared with that of Israel.

Orpah had a high esteem for her mother in law; she could not part from her but with the greatest reluctance, yet she preferred her pagan relations and worship, to all the privileges of the people of God.

Natural affections sometimes carry persons on in religion for a season, but such are influenced not by regard to God, but some attachment to this world, or the men of it.

It is frequently the case that the choice godly men make, is held in contempt and disdain by the world: this is in a particular manner the case when men who are great in this world embrace

brace religion. The King of Morocco when he embraced christianity, was told by some of his proud courtiers, that his affection for inferior's and familiarity with them, would expose him to contempt; to these he replied: "Those I love are the true nobility of heaven, and will shine there, when many of my nobles are disgraced in hell."

Ruth's relations would no doubt call her ten thousand fools for her conduct, but those are poor and very incompetent judges, who discern nothing of the importance of eternal things. At the great day of God, when all true worshippers will be placed on the right hand of Christ, and the false on the left, then will the wisdom of Ruth appear, and the folly of millions who make a wretched choice. What an infinite difference between one who like Ruth, chose an interest in God, before all that the world could bestow on her, and one who turned her back on God and his worship.

This love spoke of by John, rises higher and higher, as the christian lives under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This was the case with the first professors of the gospel. It became a proverb, "See how they love one another." The influences of the Holy Spirit are the same now as they were then, were they enjoyed in the same degree.

The case being so different at this day is owing to that lukewarmness and worldly spirit which prevails among professors. This love cannot possibly be experienced so powerfully, when professors can scarcely be distinguished from the world.

The wide difference there is between enmity and love, is that which has caused this scripture to be so comfortable to many.

A child of God in desertion may lose sight of many of his evidences, but he will scarcely ever wholly lose this. It may be compared to a mark which the shepherd puts upon his sheep, which he burns so deep, that though every other badge is worn out by the briars in the wilderness, this will remain, because burnt deeper than the wool. *It is read even in the skin itself.*

How ever low the believer may be brought, there remains in him a real regard for such as he believes to be God's children ; and when they are suspecting every other evidence, this abides with him in his most gloomy season ; therefore it appears to be the design of the Holy Ghost, that the christian should in a particular manner attend to this indelible criterion.

It is of little weight with me what any man's opinion is about scripture evidences ; I have been witness to men who have run into one extreme to avoid another, till they have been as far out  
of



of the path of scripture as conceit and bigotry could possibly drive them.

Some of these will cry out, I am for none of your marks; I would say to such what Mr. Whitfield says in his printed sermons: "If you have no marks of the children of God, you will have the mark of the devil on you. Christ himself has described the way side, the stony and thorny ground hearers, and by that description we know them."

Those scripture evidences, which the Holy Ghost has left on record, are in general both easy to be discerned and very conclusive. To neglect and overlook them is to set light by that which the Holy Ghost intends by such descriptions.

I would advise those who are timorous to consider it is not in our power to love whom we chuse. Love does not originate in the will; how many have strove and set themselves to love some men, and have proved this truth by experience. You may be very partial to your carnal relatives, who are rendered peculiarly dear to you by the tenderest ties of blood, even so almost, as to be willing like Paul, to be accursed from Christ for their sakes. But while they remain carnal, it is wholly out of your power to love them with that love, wherewith you love affectionate christians, nor can you hold that familiarity with them, which you experience with the children of God.

John

John would not have them think it strange that the world hated them. It was but natural that the seed of the serpent should hate the seed of the woman ; but says he, we are not of Cain, we have proof in ourselves that we love the brethren ; therefore we are persuaded that we are passed from death unto life, on this one consideration, because we love the brethren.

If all who experience they love the brethren were as fully persuaded that an effectual and saving change had passed on them, many who are hanging down their hands would be filled with joy, and would be giving thanks unto the Father for translating them from the kingdom of darkness, &c. Ah ! how many would wish to unite in these words, but fear deprives them of the pleasure.

We may observe that all those different things on which the affections of men fix, die away, like a fine smelling flower, which by handling and smelling, all the flavour evaporates, till they may feelingly write upon the head of every thing vanity, all is vanity. But those who have had genuine affections for the people of God, will find that fire alive even in dying circumstances.

Real christians will shake hands on the brink of Jordan, when the stroke of death has changed the countenance of a dying companion.

AND.

AND MARY HATH CHOSEN THAT GOOD PART  
WHICH SHALL NOT BE TAKEN AWAY  
FROM HER.

Luke x. 42.

THAT which gives peculiar weight to this text is Christ's testifying his approbation on Mary's choice in such a particular manner. Though he had first chosen her, yet her affectionate regard to him was highly pleasing. He makes his people comely, and takes delight in the ornaments with which he beautifies them. That should be esteemed most by us which is highest in the estimation of Christ.

If there were only an indifference in the heart of man in his fallen state, towards the things of God, it would in that case be easy to discern the thing or subject to which a man is inclined : but there being so great an enmity in every unregenerated man to God, that when his heart is changed from having an aversion to religion, that he can engage in it as his chief delight, his choice is rendered far more conspicuous. The alteration is so great, it must be observed by others as well as experienced by the person himself ; and the more distinct ideas such a person has of the enmity of the human heart to God, the more he will be impressed that such a change must originate in  
God,

God, and not in himself. How often are we witnesses to this in families, where there are some who appear so peculiarly hardened, that most who make observations are ready to suppose if any in such a family will be left of God, such a one appears to be the person, especially when a man is left to run into dreadful extremes ; but when divine grace changes the lion into a lamb, and his hardy spirit is broken, similar to what was evident to a demonstration in the goaler, the most ignorant and stupid are surprized. Now the man whose heart was bent on nothing but vanity and folly, is raised from grovelling in the filth with the swine, to be entertained with subjects which afford animation to angels : his thoughts which ran upon nothing but vanity and sin, are now principally upon the most important subjects.

Some who have been the greatest enemies to the doctrines of free grace, and whose principles filled them with prejudices against the sovereignty of God, have been constrained to acknowledge that such changes cannot possibly have any other origin than free and distinguishing love, which has obliged some to acknowledge that there must be an election of some individuals, though they cannot fall in with the Calvinist system.

God



God alone must be the author of such supernatural changes. Mary herself might have run as dreadful lengths in sin as any other had she been permitted. Regeneration being so evidently effected by a divine power, is a satisfactory proof to the believer of his being everlastingly loved.

An alteration of choice will of consequence succeed a change of nature. A man who is carried down the course of this evil world seeks his happiness in perishing and unsatisfactory things, such a one may change from one thing to another, but it is impossible he should make choice of that with which his heart is at enmity.

Christ spoke of this choice of Mary's, not only as that which he approved of, but as a proof of her state being a blessed one. If we look into the word of God we shall find those who chose the ways and word of God for their delight, always spoken of as blessed. Many heard Christ in whom his word had no place. Mary thus differing from others was owing to that greatest of all gifts, *i. e.* free grace. It was this which caused Saul, afterwards Paul, to make choice of Christ's service, and to turn his back on the dreadful work in which he had been engaged.

God's distinguishing love may be read in the choice persons are making of religious things, as evidently as vicious persons are discerned by their conduct. The goaler's rejoicing in the Lord  
with

with all his house was a proof to a demonstration that infinite love was the cause of so sudden and supernatural a change.

Mary could not admit of the least scruple or doubt what it was that her heart chose. She was now sensible that she preferred the company of Christ, and the hearing of his instructions, to all the honors or pleasures of the world. And may not a true christian be as thoroughly persuaded what his heart prefers? Of what can we be more sensible, than of our own inclinations? Offer to a person the very reverse of what he loves, and it is impossible but he will feel an antipathy to it, and this will excite his inclination more to that on which his heart was set. If religious persons were more particular in observing this, they would not be so liable to be perplexed.

Could all who sensibly perceive the choice of their hearts, be as fully and positively persuaded that infinite and everlasting love, and that nothing short of this, was the real cause of their preferring Christ to this world, they would more frequently be contemplating the infinite mercy those share of, who are thus distinguished. The inseparable connection there is between the effect and the cause, would of consequence lead the mind from the one to the other, especially when the word of God authorises such a conclusion. Nothing can be more fully asserted in scripture, than

than that those who are effectually called, were everlastingly loved. *For his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, &c.* Ep. ii. iv. v.

Inquire reader why did'st thou ever experience such sweet seasons when hearing the word of God? or enjoy those happy moments in private? That infinite favour which God has bestowed upon thee, is an everlasting one. What was the cause of Lydia's heart being opened? It was the Lord, who in love to her person opened her heart.

No hearing of ours, nor any means, however powerful, will thus change our hearts, or give us to understand that there is a pleasure to be enjoyed in religion, which all the carnal things in this world cannot afford.

When religion is made our element, and we can no more live without it, than the fish without water; when religious pleasures are the highest of all our enjoyments, then we may be assured we have not only chosen God, but he also has chosen us. And what can tend more to impress our hearts with kind thoughts of God, than an assurance of this, *i. e.* that this is a positive proof of his infinite and immutable love to us.

We can with greater satisfaction say that religious subjects are our delight, than we can persuade ourselves that we are interested in them: And why? because we have so little knowledge

of the connection which there is between the effect and the cause. A man who has an estate left him by will, of which he was the sole heir, will be as certain of its being his own at the death of the testator, as he is of his name being mentioned in the writings; had the believer more knowledge he might draw as satisfactory a conclusion.

There is nothing that we can form a judgment of with greater certainty than of our choice in natural things. That which we engage in out of choice, is so different from that which we are constrained to perform through fear or force. But in spiritual things we always have our corrupt nature to oppose our choice, which renders it more difficult to discover what our choice is. A child can tell what it chooses, that understands nothing about the cause of choice; and the children of God make choice of the ways of God long before they obtain any knowledge of the cause why they should thus seek those things which are above. It is generally some time before the christian understands those words, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again,* &c. 1 Peter i. 3.

The choice of the unregenerate being so opposite to that of the christian is very advantageous to him, especially when he observes that of all the  
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the variety of pursuits which engage the attention of worldly men, none of them have any apprehension of religion affording the highest happiness, therefore they never think that they shall at any period make choice of that as a subject for their delight, but only of constraint.

Take two persons of different dispositions ; suppose one shall chuse for his pleasure the study of history, and the other shall adopt music for his pastime ; these being but natural pursuits, make no discovery of any change in their natures. And a man may change from the one to the other without any renovation of his nature. Thus some experience many changes, and are but unregenerate men after all.

But if one of these should be by divine grace delivered from the kingdom of darkness, he will then differ materially from every other carnal man in the world. He will find now that nothing can afford him such satisfaction as religion ; the form will now no longer content him ; he now seeks communion with God, and takes delight in studying the will of God in his word. The man thus changed must perceive how much he differs from what he formerly was, and the other who remains in his former state, cannot but notice that which is so contrary to the common course of things. This further proves to a demonstration, not only a change of nature, but that those

thus called by grace, are blessed of God with all spiritual blessings, *i. e.* these, like David, are influenced to seek happiness in God, more than in all the fading flowers of this world, a change from such an earthy habit of soul to that which is heavenly, must have God for its author.

It is very evident persons never have much concern about their state, until they are savingly wrought upon; then it is, that they are taught to flee from that which is evil and make religion their choice. They then chuse religion for their comfort in life, as well as for the salvation of their souls at death. But this would not be the case, unless their natures were renewed. Without this, merely seeing their lost condition, would only check them in their career of sin, and constrain them to conform to some form of religion, but never make that religion their chief pleasure.

There was an evident difference in Cain and Abel's choice. Cain was constrained to offer sacrifices, but the faith of which Abel was possessed made his worship, his choice and his pleasure. His views of the infinitely glorious sacrifice to be offered in the fulness of time, and the love he perceived in that wonderful contrivance to save lost men, afforded him a satisfaction to which Cain was wholly a stranger.

Jacob and Esau differed widely in their choice : Esau cared nothing for the God of Abraham,

nor

nor his worship ; his delight was with loose and profligate men like himself. Pagans were far more agreeable companions for him, than the worshippers of the true God. Jacob was evidently of a different spirit ; to have constrained him to go with ignorant and loose men, would have been an intollerable burden.

Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the crown of Egypt. Honors from ignorant Pagans were in his estimation, mean and contemptible, compared with those honors which come from God only. It is the new nature that is the cause of the choice. Jacob was a man of a different taste ; he had not only the blessing of Isaac, but he was blessed with a new nature.

Christian take particular notice of thy choice.

A saving work on the soul is more certainly known by the choice of the person, than by either joys or terrors. These may be occasioned by sudden impressions, which sometimes are as the morning cloud, and early dew which passeth away. That choice which is the effect of grace, is habitual and permanent. Amidst all the waves of this tempestuous sea, it will always steer the soul to anchor under the rock of ages. This choice is an evidence of a principle implanted in the soul by God himself. *I will give them one heart and one way,* Jer. xxxii. 89.

If God has blessed thee with true grace, thou wilt chuse the same pleasures, walk in the same path, and drink into the same spirit of all who have arrived in the heavenly world.

Choice therefore being an undeniable proof of love, the person hangs to that very thing he chooses ; he who experiences Mary's choice, chooses that good part which shall never be taken away from him.

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I WILL GO IN THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD  
GOD ; I WILL MAKE MENTION OF  
THY RIGHTEOUSNESS, EVEN  
OF THINE ONLY !

Pfalm lxxi. 16.

CAN any language be more opposite to that of a Pharisee, or worldly professor, than this ?—When words are the index of the heart, a man's character is as conspicuous in his speech as in his conduct.

The experimental christian speaks in a strain peculiar to the children of God ; and the phraseology is understood only by those who are taught the language by their own feelings. Hypocrites and formal professors may mimic some expressions, but there are some scriptures which are neither understood by them, nor even scarce ever noticed.



noticed. But we may say of gracious persons, by their speech you shall know them.

By the advantage of education, a man may obtain some common notions about the merits of Christ, and he may see, by a general knowledge, that no man can merit Heaven by the deeds of the law ; but he will not perceive that which caused Paul to speak in this strain. *But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

It is evident, to me, that it was the design of the Holy Ghost, in having such experience as this text contains recorded, that christians should read their own characters in the language of David, and others, to the end of the world.

It is a satisfactory proof of a man's acquaintance with true christianity, when he finds that the very sayings which the Holy Ghost has left on record in the Psalms, is the very language of his heart. The children of God, whether under the Old Testament or New, speak the same things. *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.* The same spirit influences the children of God to speak in the same strain in every age ; their hearts being changed to love the very same subjects, this follows of consequence.

No carnal man can speak this language from  
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his heart ; and the more the believer is satisfied in this respect, the more he will discern himself to be a plant of the Father's planting. If the christian be once thoroughly persuaded, that there is that wrought in his heart which was never wrought in the heart of any but a real child of God, he cannot but draw a favourable conclusion.

Foolish virgins may arrive at the theory of religion, but the experimental knowledge of this text is a lesson which God himself can only teach. What ideas can those have of the strength of the Lord, who never have been taught their own weakness ? And what understanding can those have of his righteousness, who never saw their own wretchedness ? What then, my reader, could have taught thee not only the language, but the real experience of christians ? And does not thy conscience bear thee this testimony, that the language of this text is thine ? If there is no possibility of obtaining this, by common means, then it is manifest God has been thine instructor. Men may communicate to thee some head knowledge, but God only can teach thy heart.

Why are those parts of the Word of God in which help and strength are promised, so highly esteemed by thee ? It is evident they are not so valued by common professors. How would it rejoice the hearts of many were they assured that this promise was theirs ! *As thy day is, thy strength shall*

*shall be.* Why art thou esteeming it so great a favour to be enabled to believe? Though it may be but at some particular seasons thou hast been helped, in some measure, to adopt the words of the Psalmist: *I had fainted, unless I had believed, to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.* Those who esteem it such an infinite mercy to be helped to believe, are true believers.

If the Holy Ghost had not taken thee into the same school into which he takes all the children of God, thou hadst never learnt such things. Most have reason to remember that they were once *strangers and aliens to the commonwealth of Israel*, and wholly unacquainted with either the language or the difficulties of the people of God.

What unregenerate man is animated by beholding that there is in Christ, all that a poor soul can possibly need? It is the child of God only, that desires nothing so much as to be assured Christ is his.

Is it not evident to demonstration, that to the unconverted man, he is *as a root out of a dry ground*; there is nothing in Christ that appears desirable to him.

There is nothing in which Satan tempts a soul more than in the method of seeking for assurance. As he is particularly averse to the believer's being in the possession of such a pearl, he practices all his cunning to prevent his obtaining it.

Those

Those who seek for it in any other *way* than that which the Holy Ghost has prescribed, are sure to experience great perplexity. Many who have had great experience have been kept much in the dark the greatest part of their travel, on account of their want of knowledge how this is obtained. Some have been tempted to look for extraordinary visions; this is frequently occasioned by hearing some poor deceived creature tell something of the marvellous, in order to make others admire them as Heaven's favourites. Others have, for years together, refused taking the least comfort to themselves, because they have not experienced such seasons of joy as they have heard some speak of. If these perplexed christians were as attentive to the plaintive strains in which some, even of the most eminent of God's children, have been constrained to speak, they would be both better informed, and be more in the way to arrive at the comfortable frame they wish.

Those who have experienced very uncommon manifestations of divine love, ought to be very cautious how they speak of these, before weak christians. They not only give Satan an advantage to fill themselves with pride, but may drive some timorous christians to the brink of despair. It is a pity that one christian should help the enemy to distress another; yet this is frequently done: while one has been gratifying his own  
pride,



pride, in relating something of the remarkable joys he has been indulged with, another has been, at the same time, drawing the most gloomy conclusions.

The language of this text is the universal experience of all christians ; it is only these who feel their own weakness and inability to go on without divine assistance, therefore, they alone are the persons who are looking for help from Heaven. The more they experience, the more humble and depending they are ; and think, of all persons under the Heavens, they have the greatest need of strength from the Lord.

Though they are hoping that such strength as their necessities call for, shall be afforded them, yet they find as absolute a necessity to apply to God for assistance, to help them to lay hold on the promise, as strength to go through the difficulty. These are lessons the carnal are wholly ignorant of!

None could mention, with propriety, their going in the strength of the Lord, without some humble hope, that God would graciously afford them his assistance ; and the words imply as much : experience increases this hope. This is not the language of a christian, at his first entering into the field, but of those who have been taught more lessons than the A b c, of christianity.

Those

Those who have frequently experienced help in difficulty, may, like Samuel, set up their stones of Ebenezer ; a proper use of experience will not lead the believer from Christ, in this respect, but will engage his heart in a more entire dependance on him ; and that with an increasing sense of his own weakness and inability. Carnal and unregenerate men, will no more plead nor live upon the Word of God, than the dead in their tombs.

Those who are dead in their sins, are not only insensible of the need of divine assistance, but of the pleasures which the true believer finds, when God is helping him. All which, if properly attended to, will assist the christian in perceiving, how God has distinguished him from others. It is not in one or two things that those who are born of God differ from common professors, but in a great variety.

When God had given David such deliverances as had fully convinced him, that only God could have relieved him in such distressing circumstances, the kindness of God, which he discerned in these times of difficulty, was more sweet to him than the deliverance itself. It confirmed him in this, that he was beloved of the Lord, and indeed this appears to be one end which God has in view in permitting such difficulties in which himself only, can afford the christian relief.

We

We frequently hear old christians on their death beds, mention such times of difficulty with greater pleasure than times of prosperity : their enriching moments have been their most trying ones. The christian may look back to the time when such language as that in the text, would have appeared to him very ridiculous ; and to have heard any man speak in such an unintelligible strain, would have been a sufficient caution to him to seek no intimacy with such a man. But how different now ! Once the believer looked upon this as cant and nonsense, but now he understands that those only who have spiritual life and knowledge will speak in this strain ; and and that very language which would once have made him flee from a fellow creature, now has in it an attraction he is not able to describe. The company of such has at times afforded him a pleasure superior to any satisfaction that can be found among the men of the world.

The christian finds by experience that those are very unsuitable companions for him, whose hardness and ignorance may be known by their spirit, and even felt in their words.

It has been of great advantage to many of God's children, to hear such boast of their strength, or the goodness of their hearts ; it has convinced them the more that God has dealt with them in infinite mercy, in not leaving them in

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such

such ignorance. Those only are wise, who are jealous over their own hearts. We read the truth of God's word, both in the carnal world, and in those who are transformed into the mould of the gospel.

How would it once have provoked the christian, to have been told, that he had a hard and a deceitful heart! But experience has taught him to think worse of himself, than any of his observers. That knowledge which the believer has of the impossibility of his standing in his own strength, is not mere theory, but a real sense of his weakness, and that frequently dearly bought, by ignorantly attempting to go in his own strength.

Ignorant men are sometimes surprised to find eminent persons have so low an opinion of their own performances, especially when they speak in the language of Paul : *Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.* Phil. iii. 10. This is not to be wondered at, if we consider that such men are wholly ignorant of the spirituality of God's law, by which, the believer judges of himself. While others are admiring his gifts and graces, he feels himself to be weakness itself ;  
and



and that, without his Saviour's arm, he must sink into the water, like Peter.

It is, therefore, the experimental christian only that can adopt the language of the Psalmist : *I will go in the strength of the Lord, &c.* The christian not only talks, but feels, that the righteousness of Christ is precious. Being fully convinced of the imperfection of all his devotion, he sees the folly of those who vainly imagine they can confide in a righteousness of their own. It is in the word of God that we find not only the knowledge of God, but the best description of real christianity.

Men dead in sin, have no more idea of spiritual necessities than a dead corpse can be sensible of the wants of living bodies ; but those who are truly taught of God, will frequently find themselves as sensible of their spiritual wants, as they are of those of their bodies.

The longer the christian is spared, the more he experiences the necessity he stands in of that perfect robe, which covers all his defects ; and that righteousness in which he sees he magnifies the law, and makes it honourable.

It is highly agreeable to God, for christians to speak freely of these things to their fellow-travellers. David, the man after God's own heart, could say, *Come, ye that fear the Lord, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul* : and he also informs us as

fully of his soul-complaints and darkneſs ; and, doubtleſs, it was a familiar converſation about ſpiritual things, which God commends. *Then they that feared the Lord, ſpoke often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it ; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.* Mal. iii. 16.

When thoſe who are advanced in life, and grown in grace, freely mention their difficulties, and, eſpecially, thoſe which they have met with from their own hearts, it has been of the greateſt encouragement to others. Many who have too high thoughts of the attainments of others, through ignorance, form the moſt gloomy apprehenſions of themſelves ; ſuch would be as much encouraged as they are caſt down, had they but clearer ideas what ſtruggles others have with ſin.

But this is far from being the caſe, when a man boaſts of his experience, to gain applauſe, and to make the ignorant wonder, and even to make the timorous look upon themſelves as nothing, when compared with ſuch highly favoured beings as they imagine themſelves to be ; how often do we ſee ſuch blazing ſtars fall from a ſtation, which appeared by far the moſt lofty in the religious horizon, down into the dreadful quagmire of ſin ; and, in that ſtate, both live and die !

die ! As the proud boasting of such, distresses many, so their fall shocks many more, and fills them with dread and horror. It is God's determination that no flesh shall glory in his presence !

So diametrically opposite are weak christians to these, that I have frequently seen such of so timid a disposition, that they have been afraid even to mention those very comforts which they could not deny having received. As Satan tempts the former to pride, so he endeavours to drive the latter to despair. We know however high any may pretend to rise, the tallest cedars in God's Lebanon will acknowledge with the Psalmist, *In the Lord only have they righteousness and strength.*

Satan may be compared to those hardened wretches, who live near to the sea coasts, and hang out false lights on the surrounding hills, on purpose to mislead the unwary mariner, in order to enrich themselves with the spoils of a shipwreck. If permitted he will use his utmost art to perplex and distress Christ's lambs, and if possible make all those suffer shipwreck, who have set sail for the heavenly world.

All this proves the necessity there is for gracious persons to be well acquainted with the word of God ; and to pay more regard to the experience therein recorded, than to any thing they may hear from poor mistaken mortals.

The feelings of the believer which may be discerned in this scripture will be found a true light to many, while the fancied experience of some will be to the unwary as the *ignis fatuus*, which endangers the lives of those it leads astray. To the law and to the testimony, if men speak not according to these it is because there is no light in them ; but on the contrary, when their experience coincides with the word of God, it is the effect of the operation of that self-same Spirit who has in every age been given to the people of God. If any man would read his name in the lamb's book of life, he must first seek to find the language of his heart in such a part of God's word as this.

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WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN AM I STRONG.

2 Cor. xii. 10.

THE true believer has not only an understanding of the method of salvation given him, but such an acquaintance with scripture as is peculiar to those who are taught of God.

Carnal men are wholly ignorant of the true meaning of this passage ; such may read the letter of this scripture, as Paul read the law before the commandment came with power to his soul ; for though he might have read it a thousand



land times, yet he saw nothing of its real meaning. This is the case with all unconverted men; though they are possessed of the greatest natural abilities, yet they are as incapable of forming a just idea of this text, as the uninstructed pagan; which proves, that an experimental knowledge of true christianity, is that which can only be acquired by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. This, therefore, is one of those scriptures which foolish virgins, and formal professors, pass over without taking any more notice of the sense of it, than the most profligate; for as these never felt their own unworthiness, so it is impossible they should understand any thing of spiritual weakness or strength.

We are fully convinced by this text, that the experience and feelings of Paul were similar to those of other men, and that all the branches in the vine, are alike dependant on the stock, and must not only be taught this dependance, but kept sensible of it.

This knowledge of spiritual weakness Paul himself lived a total stranger to before his conversion; and were all the children of God to keep a distinct idea how ignorant they once were of themselves, it would be a proof to them that their having now an understanding of the scripture, is an evidence of spiritual life.

Perhaps the temptation mentioned in this con-

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text, brought Paul into as full a conviction of his own weakness as the waves did Peter.

It is no small encouragement to the believer to find his own experience bear any resemblance to that of so great a man as Paul, and to be fully satisfied that great grace and a great sense of weakness may meet in the very same person.

Many have called in question the truth of their faith because they have found it fail them in times of their greatest need ; and had not God in great kindness to his church revealed and handed down the weakness, as well as the remarkable faith of his people, many would have been hard to persuade, that it was possible for that person to be a partaker of true faith, who could at times be made to act so inconsistently by his unbelief.

This sense of weakness is a greater evidence of genuine faith than that which those have, who pass on year after year, and are utter strangers to themselves and their own inability to stand in a time of difficulty ; such persons appear to be, according to Paul's expression, bastards and not sons ; to be then wholly insensible of our weakness, is a mark of a hypocrite.

Paul no doubt felt his weakness sometime before he had strength granted him ; yet even his weakness was as positive a proof of his being a gracious man, as the strength that he received, evidenced to him, Christ's love and care.

Nothing

Nothing can be more fully proved, than that those who have been remarkable for strong faith, have at other times given as great instances of their weakness; nor would this be so much matter of surprise, if we considered that it never was the design of God to make any of his people independent of himself; but to keep them as sensible of their need of the Holy Ghost to help them, as the blood of Christ to atone for their sins.

Abraham, the father of the faithful, through fear, denied his wife, though at some other seasons, nothing would have intimidated him; but this proves that when he was strong in faith, he was then under a supernatural influence; his strength was from above. Without this great variety in the experience of a believer, he would not be so thoroughly convinced, that the strength afforded him was given from above, but his finding himself so weak when deserted, and the reverse when assisted by the Holy Spirit, teaches him experimentally his own inability and that great kindness which is in God towards his people. We are taught what God is by experience, as well as what weak and unworthy creatures we are.

Jacob had strong faith in some difficulties, yet the hearing of Esau's coming to meet him with such a number of men, threw him into the greatest confusion; his unbelief so much prevailed, that he seemed to think that the God of  
his

his father Abraham, who had so particularly promised to be with him, would at this trying moment desert him, and that he should see many of his beloved family cut to pieces. *Then was Jacob greatly afraid, and distressed, &c.* Gen. xxxii. 7. He little thought that morning, when he had that remarkable vision of the angels of God encamping round him, that he should so soon be doubting the faithfulness of God; and it evidently appears that it was the design of God not to weaken the faith of Jacob by this trial, but to give him stronger faith than ever. So it is in general; the greater those difficulties are with which God tries his people, the more they tend to increase their faith.

Can any one suppose, that Jacob had no faith at this trying time? He, no doubt, had true faith, but the trial made him feel his own weakness.

David, after having given such astonishing specimens of strong faith, yet cries out, *All men are liars, and I shall, one day, perish by the hand of Saul!*

## G NO 61

From such instructing lessons as these, a christian may reap great advantages; he does not only learn what is in man, but that kindness which is in God to his own people, and which he, in a peculiar manner, manifests to them in their greatest difficulties. Why, then, should  
any



any distress themselves, by calling in question the truth of their own faith, on account of having seen their own weakness on some particular occasions ; this is nothing new, but that which the people of God have experienced in every age.

Yet we cannot suppose, that any of those who were so eminent for their knowledge of God, could, at all times, say, with Paul, *When I am weak, then am I strong !* It is by degrees that the children of God are taught this lesson. Paul ; no doubt, was exercised with great and repeated difficulties, before he could adopt this language ; christians must not hastily draw gloomy and dismal conclusions concerning themselves, because they feel no strength given them immediately from above : their trials sink them, and they begin to fear this promise belongs not to them ; *As thy day is, thy strength shall be.* Impatience increases our troubles, yet all this tends to show us how weak we are.

After believers have been greatly tried, and repeatedly carried through difficulties, and in such a manner as convinces them, that no human power could have borne them up, they see, like Israel in the Red-sea, God must have been with them, or those waves would have certainly overwhelmed them. Setting up stones of  
Ebenezer,

Ebenezar, is more frequently the practice of old christians than young ones.

We believe with pleasure, when our experience tends to shame us out of our unbelief; when Jacob was convinced of Joseph being alive, it was then that he saw his unbelief, and that all things were for him; and nothing had been, in reality, against him. Most of our difficulties would not try our faith, if we understood as well what God intended by them, when we were in them, as we do afterwards.

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P. S. I cannot leave this subject, without adding an Appendix; in which, I shall enlarge chiefly, upon those perfections in the Divine Nature, which are manifested in the person, sacrifice, and priestly office of Christ; also, on those promises which particularly tend to lead the timorous soul to that foundation which God has laid in Zion.

6 NO 61

T. P.

END OF THE SECOND PART.

